FIRST LOOK:
JEDI KNIGHT 3

SPY HUNTER 2 UNVEILED

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COUNTER-STRIKE ...IS XBOX KING

EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE INSIDE

ONIMUSHA 3 STARRING JEAN RENO pg. 60

ISSUE 121

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MAY 2003

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TEEN
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Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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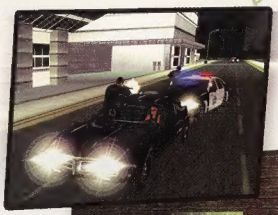
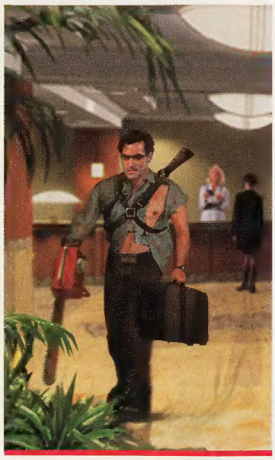


Meet Sparks – your wish is his keystroke, colon, double backslash, execute command.

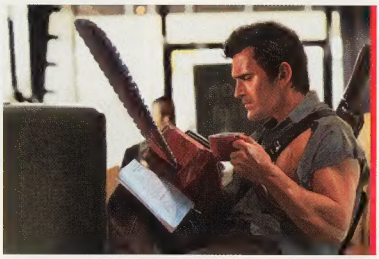
PlayStation.2 XBOX GAMECUBE PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE Shiny ENTERTAINMENT ATARI

24 HOURS WITH ASH

We tracked this ZOMBIE-KILLING MEGASTAR on a recent stop to Dearborn, Michigan.



8:22 a.m. Ash arrives at the swanky Dearborn Hotel wearing a pair of wrap-around shades.



10:56 a.m. We caught Ash sipping a cup of Sri Lankan Chai Latte at a trendy local bistro.

11:23 a.m. In a rush. Ash, late for a meeting with his agent, fends off Deadites with a chainsaw.

12:44 p.m. Ash switches from the trusty chainsaw to a boomstick just for kicks.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Stop following me!!"

~ASH, to our photographer during an encounter in a public restroom.

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore Violence

XBOX

PlayStation.2

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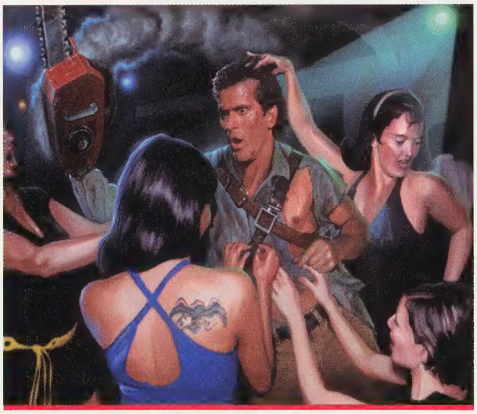
2:31 p.m. Friends in low places. An angry Ash tells a slew of pesky Deadites to stop bothering him by killing them.

5:32 p.m. Ash getting a little R&R on a friend's boat in Lake Michigan.

7:46 p.m. Presto chango! Ash throws a little magic spell on those darned Deadites.



11:34 p.m. Killing is hard work. Ash takes advantage of the Dearborn nightlife after a job well done.

EVIL DEAD
A FISTFUL OF BOOMSTICK

For more snapshots of today's featured star, visit evildeadgame.com

VIS entertainment plc

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PlayStation 2

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COVER STORY

34 COUNTER-STRIKE

With Halo 2 delayed (which isn't really a delay because Microsoft hadn't announced an actual release date, blah blah), what is the faithful Xbox minion to do? GI comes to the rescue and is delivering the Counter-Strike lowdown to lift all the sweet gamers' spirits in this time of need.

FEATURE

44 ADVENT

A revered sci-fi author is wielding his pen in the name of a new video game. We'll give you the skinny on what this title's all about, who the mystery writer is, and what his involvement entails.

GameSpy 2002 PS2 Game of the Year!

"A rare must own title." -EGM, Editors Choice Gold Award

"Funny, smart, richly entertaining and superbly crafted." -OPM, 5/5

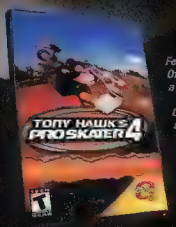
"Still the Best!" -GamePro, 5/5

2002 Best Alternative Sports Game of the Year PS2, Xbox and GameCube.

"Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4 is easily the best game in the series..." -IGN.com

THE CRITICS HAVE SPOKEN...

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4

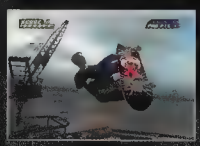


Featuring songs by N.W.A, Offspring, and System of a Down.

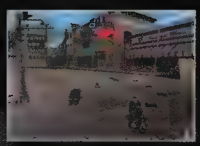
Official Strategy Guide available from Brady Games.

* Online play exclusive to PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system.

All new tricks - skitch behind cars, skate on moving objects, and transfer over spines.



14 of the world's top pros challenge you to prove your skills.



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18 GI SPY
The Game Informer paparazzi stalk the video game industry, bringing you candid photos of all the action.

20 DEAR GI
Our readers have a wide variety of interests. Which of these is not a topic discussed in Dear GI: robots, food shelf life, ninjas throughout history, movie licenses, or evolution?

26 NEWS
Holding pattern for Halo 2 in 2003. Nefarious reasons or no, EA doesn't have any competition in the NASCAR market anymore. What would make anyone's day? That's right, screenshots for Transformers and pics of the new *Tomb Raider* movie.

52 PREVIEWS
We've got more up and coming, high profile titles than you could shake a broadsword at. With scads of new games popping up around the globe just in time for E3 perusal, we're sharing the details that can't be found anywhere else.

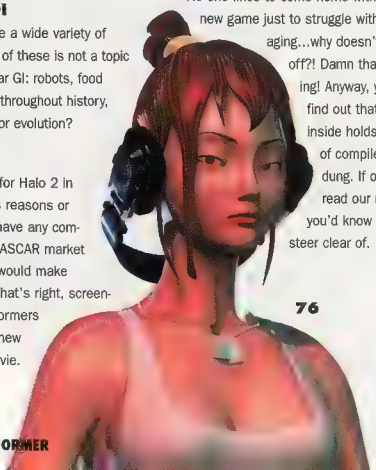
74 REVIEWS
No one likes to come home with a shiny, new game just to struggle with the packaging...why doesn't it come off?! Damn that packaging! Anyway, you could find out that the disk inside holds megabytes of compiled horse dung. If only you'd read our reviews, you'd know what to steer clear of.

97 CHARTS
What's hot? What's not? What's up? What's down? It's not NASDAQ, it's the Retail Sales Data and the GI editors' Top 10 Games.

100 SECRET ACCCESS
Call it a special feature of the game...we let you know where more ammo, unlimited lives, and the usual subversive accoutrements of you favorite titles are hiding.

104 CLASSIC GI
An expansive and complete rundown of major sports' classic titles (yes, all the favorites are well represented) is the Classic Feature of the month. And, a fistful of nostalgia gets laid on ya with reminders of gone-but-not-yet-forgotten titles.

108 ETC
We like accessories. Especially Lisa, but she's a girl and gets to care about shoes that can't be worn very often and certainly not in the winter. We digress – accessories and toys are good.



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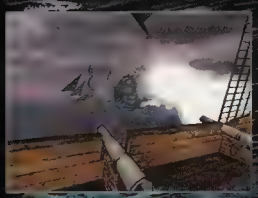

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EDITORS' FORUM

ARGUMENT OF THE MONTH

The other day Chet peeked his head in my office and said to me, "Dude, we would be so hardcore if we picked Ikaruga as the Game of the Month!" quickly followed by a "that game is sweet," and cackles of glee as he headed back to his desk.

This, as you may have guessed, is not the first time that an editor has campaigned his or her favorite vid for the illustrious Game Of The Month title. From Kristian screaming "Freelancer!" whenever the issue is discussed, to Justin mocking (in a rather silly falsetto voice, I might add) whatever game doesn't have what it takes, the race for GoTM is always a heated one.

We even went as far as to make up some simple rules like "PC games can't win, unless all the console ones stink," or "Any game that uses the same name and just changes the date can't win unless we're really desperate." We are a pathetic bunch, we know, but those were our rules.

Well, we finally figured out how to work around at least one of them. From this issue onward, Game Informer will have both a console and PC Game of the Month. While that doesn't fix Chet's "hardcore" problem or the fact that we don't know what the heck to do with Madden each and every year, it is a start. If nothing else, at least we have one less completely arbitrary rule to remember.

Andy McNamara
Editor-In-Chief
andy@gameinformer.com

1. Thinking there's hidden money in brick ceilings, Justin knocks himself unconscious. **2a.** Attempting to match the height of his idol, Yao Ming, Matt eats wild mushrooms and has the best eight hours of his life...**2b.**...then mounts Andy thinking he's Yoshi. **3.** In the hopes that they could fly, Chet and Reiner sew a raccoon tail on their pants and jump off the Empire State Building **4.** Kato gets stuck in a random pipe trying to reach a warp zone. Lisa tries to help. **5.** On a recent visit to Reptile Gardens, Kristian reduces the turtle population by throwing flaming newspaper balls at them.

REINER, THE RAGING GAMER

reiner@gameinformer.com

I don't know about you guys, but I'm really getting sick and tired of tutorials. I can honestly say that if I play one more platform game that insists on teaching me how to jump, I may give up video games, pack my bags, and move to India to become a Hari Krishna. I can understand the importance of easing a player into a game, but what about the people who already know how to operate a controller? It's such a redundant and unnecessary action. I pray that developers hear my cry and make a conscious effort to leave all training exercises on the side as additional modes, or are at least courteous enough to let people skip the damn things. After all, isn't that why games come packaged with manuals?

MATT, THE ORIGINAL GAMER

matt@gameinformer.com

It's funny how we start to outgrow things like favorite games or bands. Just like you reach a point where you say, "Hey, I don't think I'm going to buy the next Busta Rhymes CD," sometimes you find yourself becoming less interested in a franchise that has been one of the staples of your gaming diet. For example, Tony Hawk 4 was the first in the series that I didn't complete. Some of you may feel the same way about titles in the Street Fighter, Mario Bros., or Tomb Raider franchises. You'll always love them, and always give the next one a shot, but – barring some massive overhaul of the formula – it'll never be the obsession that it once was. I'm not giving up on Tony yet, though, as I know Neversoft has the creativity to bring me back into the fold.

KRISTIAN, THE VIDEO VIKING

kristian@gameinformer.com

I have just had one of the best gaming months in recent memory. I've been playing so many good releases across such a broad spectrum of genres, it's unbelievable. Amplitude started off my month, Freelancer wowed me in the middle, and Gallop Racer 2003 closed it out. There was some crap thrown in here and there, but those three had me on cloud nine. Who would have thought that a rhythm game, a space exploration/combat title, and a horseracing simulator could whip me into such a frenzy? In closing, I'd like to urge those of you who have your driver's license to get the hell out of the left lane if you're not going to pass people. Fair enough?

JUSTIN, THE DIGITAL DEVIANT

justin@gameinformer.com

Many of my gaming wishes have been granted in the current console generation. Metroid Prime and Jak and Daxter are helping abolish load times. Both racing and action games are getting more nonlinear. Eternal Darkness and Metal Gear Solid 2 mess with our minds in ways TV and movies can't. Red Faction II and Tao Feng are upping the ante for interactive environments. Developers are finding out what works to increase replay through Franchise modes, Quest modes, and unlockables. I want to see more customization in games, though. I want more control over how I play and what skills I have. I'm looking for Deus Ex 2 to handle that area nicely.

KATO, THE GAME KATANA

kato@gameinformer.com

This month, I got the chance to replay an old favorite of mine – Xevious. I spent more than a few quarters on it back in the day, but that doesn't mean I was any good. My oh my, how some things never change. Unlike walking and talking at the same time, I haven't gotten better at that title as I've gotten older. Still, I guess it's good that I never felt the computer got in some cheap deaths – rock-solid gameplay can still be king. On a different note, for those who thought my blurb last month was crazy talk, check out the news story regarding Electronic Arts and NASCAR. Is this the start of a trend?

CHET, THE JOYSTICK JOCKEY

chet@gameinformer.com

Certain titles deeply offend me, simply because they are a game. One such example is the Medal of Honor series. In a way, they mock the reality of the situations that they mimic. Take, for instance, the raiding of Normandy Beach. Players are actually meant to enjoy this scenario, and without the horror of that situation properly expressed, most players get the wrong impression. Compare this with *Saving Private Ryan*, and you can see my point. As games continue to permit more artistic freedom, they should strive to be true art; that is, to convey meaningful emotions like film. Perhaps the fact that games are inherently supposed to be fun make it impossible for them to reach a level on par with others.

LISA, LA GAME NIKITA

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I like video games with scores. Not scores as in point value, but scores as in soundtracks. This might be part of the reason that some genres (survival horror and point-and-click puzzle in particular) take up so much space on my list of all-time greats. For example, with Chris Vrenna's assistance, the Alice soundtrack is certainly a decent piece of music outside the game experience. Adding to the NIN member pool, Trent Reznor is no stranger to the video game score, either. Looking for a listening recommendation whether or not you dug the game? I liked the Myst III: Exile score quite a bit.

#1 SELLING BASEBALL GAME!*

Better Than Real.

MLB SLUGFEST 20 04

game preview at midwaysports.net

The top-selling exclusive adrenaline-style baseball videogame is back with a ton of new features

Loads of ALL-NEW features like individual MLB™ player batting stances and pitching deliveries.

Ferocious adrenaline-style play lets you go in spikes high; then, relive it from any angle with the new customizable instant replay.

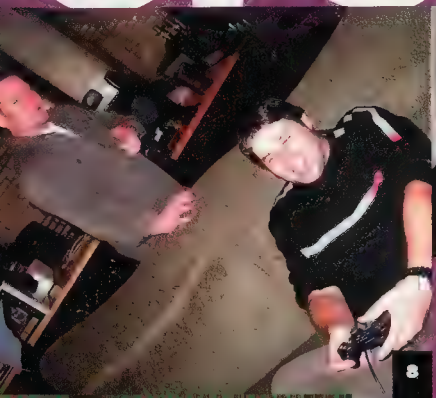
Pit your favorite MLB™ players in an ALL-NEW Home Run Derby® and square off against the most feared long ball hitters in the league.

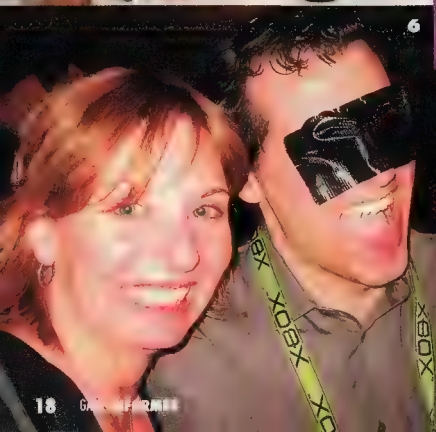
EVERYONE E Comic Mischief Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation 2

GAME BOY ADVANCE

GI SPY





CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE SEAMY UNDERBELLY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

1 Capcom senior vice president of sales and marketing Robert Lindsey thinks you're a girl man. **2** So does Medal of Honor/*Saving Private Ryan* consultant Capt. Dale Dye. He did two tours in Vietnam and has three Purple Hearts, so we're not going to argue with him. **3** So Cal pop punkers Unwritten Law entertain the crowd at the Interactive Achievement Awards with a spectacular set of Dashboard Confessional covers. Now, if you'll excuse us, we've got to go make a mix tape for the girl we dated in 7th grade. **4** Kristen Dalton, from USA Network's *The Dead Zone*, presents an award at the Interactive Achievement Awards with Chris "Mr. Happy Pants" Taylor from Gas Powered Games. **5** Midway's Tim Cummins, Marci Ditter, and Aaron Grant: Doing their part to ensure that plastic monkeys get the attention they deserve. Thankfully, bipartisan support is very strong on this issue. Democracy totally rules!! **6** Amber Alert: Nintendo's Julia Roether has kidnapped G4 Television's (and former *Next Generation* editor-in-chief) Tom Russo! **7** At the annual D.I.C.E. convention in Vegas, Shigeru Miyamoto falls asleep while Yu Suzuki discusses Shenmue III. **8** Sean Kauppinen and Michael Lustenberger of Sony Online Cos in the Game Informer conference room.

STAR WARS THE CLONE WARS

The Clone War is up and running on Xbox *Live*.

Wreak havoc on the ground and in the air of six different worlds. Boot up and battle it out with other troopers on Xbox *Live* in four multiplayer modes: Duel, Conquest, Control Zone and Academy. And see if you have what it takes to dominate the battlefields in a galaxy far, far away.

www.swclonewars.com

Single player battles rage across six worlds.

Multiplayer mayhem with up to 8 players.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
VIOLENCE

DEAR GI

ADAPTATION

I stumbled across an article online a couple weeks ago regarding the fact that a Hollywood production company had acquired the rights to make a movie out of Metroid. My friends seem to think that this is a bad thing. I, for one, am partially excited at the prospect of a movie made out of my favorite video game. I just don't want the movie – if it is ever made – to suck.

Megun-chan
via aol.com

***Variety* recently reported that the creators of *Final Destination* and *American Pie* have acquired the rights to make a Metroid movie. This is the latest franchise to be picked up in Hollywood's mad dash to suck up the best video game licenses for movie translations. Fatal Frame, State of Emergency, Grand Theft Auto, Crazy Taxi, Dead or Alive, American McGee's Alice, Crimson Skies, Max Payne, Oni, Perfect Dark, and Silent Hill have all been purchased in the last year or two. We covered the House of the Dead movie in issue 111; and Doom, Quake, and Duke Nukem are still stuck in different stages of development hell.**

While the film adaptations of classic game franchises haven't always fared well at the box office, the powers that be must see Tomb Raider-like potential in the properties to justify this much interest. Hopefully, they'll keep gamers in mind on their way to the cineplex.

TURNING JAPANESE

I am disappointed. I was reading your March issue and turned to the ETC page and saw the Game Informer editor standees. Those are a great idea! I knew they weren't real but I had to try. I hopped online, but www.chick-phil-a.com doesn't exist. Too bad; I could really use a room full of Game Informer standees watching over me at night. I see it now – Reiner is there, Chet is there, and...and you, Kato, are there, too! If only....ahhh.

Dan
Via aol.com

Just like a bevy of other standees that should not exist (Clown from *Spawn*, Pinhead from *Hellraiser*, Martha Stewart), life-size recreations of the Game Informer editors hovering over unsuspecting sleepers is a horror too great for the U.S. government to allow on these shores. But, we've heard that Japanese versions will be available for import in the third quarter of 2003.

SCREWING THE POOCH

I ordered All-Star Baseball 2004 for the PS2 after I read your preview of the baseball games [Basewars: The Battle for Cooperstown in Issue 119]. You raved about the game and tend to be dead on, especially when it comes to sports. But, I have one complaint: ASB 2004 is not an online game, like your preview said. The only online option is to download updated rosters. I just spent $50 in shipping and pre-orders to go online! What's the deal?

Stephan Gog
Via yahoo.com

Despite the short time between our article and the launch of the title, Acclaim removed the online play options we reported in Issue 119. We always try to give the most up-to-date information, and the omission of online play was covered in the review of All-Star Baseball 2004 in Issue 120.

GOT MILK?

I just wanted to comment on milk expiration dates, I think they should make milk last exactly 2 days longer.

Gray Boy
Via hotmail.com

We're totally in agreement. The state of milk longevity in this country is abhorrent.

PHONICS ROCK

You guys are the greatest. Since I ordered your mag, my grades in reading have gone up, which means I get more vids for good grades (SCORE!). I just want to give you guys a sincere thank you, and keep up the good work.

Brian Boyd
Via msn.com

We're here to make the masses literate...and put tutors out of business. Someday, we hope to learn how to read and write ourselves!

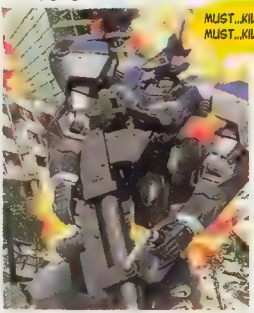
ROBOT WARS

Your last words in the Steel Battalion review were, "...and that, my friends, will be utter bliss." That is exactly what I'm experiencing right now. All my life I've lived for robots. In elementary school I kept a design notebook of them. The book was so diverse and inventive that it influenced several of my classmates to start their own. I had always lived for the day when robot jocks would meet with opposing mech pilots on the field of battle to determine the fate of nations.

Well, the school of the world's first mech jockeys is now open and Steel Battalion is our trainer. As I set up the huge controller this afternoon with my 11-year-old daughter, I shared with her the vision of a future where people are needed to pilot robots to determine world politics instead of bloodying battlefields. I told her that if she really got good at this game there might come a day when her skills would become valuable. If the U.S.R.P.C. (United States Robotic Pilot Corp) is ever formed, Xbox Live will surely be the pool it recruits from!

Well I say, let's have a cockpit peripheral that you actually sit in with force feedback and swivel (lateral as well as up and down) actuators for the real feel of a battle mech! Hell, I say where's the real deal?! Bring on the big boys, I'll take a Decider M-7 with a couple of Madcats on the side! C'mon Goliath, I got your David right here!!!

PhiSchmo
Robot Jox, Inc.



While it's true that game peripherals have always been an important part of the industry, a cockpit that you can actually sit in may be a little cost-prohibitive for most companies. We suggest reveling in the joy of Steel Battalion's commanding controller and hope that more mech games of the same caliber arrive on store shelves.

As a side note, we must also state that the training regimen you've set up for your 11-year old daughter is a little disconcerting. What about playing catch?

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST?

Games have come a long way in their short history. When a notable game comes around, say Diablo II, I judge others by it for some time – at least until another landmark vid is released. I did it with Final Fantasy VII, Soul Calibur, and now with Vice City. Certain characteristics make them distinct; like gripping personalities, replay value, stunning visuals, or non-linear gameplay. With a combination of feelings from so many great games over the past few years, I expect more from developers in upcoming titles.

Little by little, I am noticing more art in video games. I love cel shading and the direction it is taking. As for the soundtrack department, I don't know if any game will ever compare to Vice City. Also, dialogue is definitely getting more involved. Something that I have grown quite fond of is the amount of creative control that gamers are given now. I can't help but be impressed with WarCraft III's world editor or Vice City's non-linear missions. Also, games like the Sims allow players to completely create the main character. Why can't more games follow suit?

Alan DeHaven
Via hotmail.com

Why can't more titles light the world on fire by revolutionizing gameplay, graphics, soundtrack, and storytelling? As Andy pointed out recently in the Editors' Forum, games are made that generate profits. The best way to show companies what we want to see in stores is to buy the ones that we like, regardless of their marketing budget. Go out and pick up a title that strikes your fancy. Maybe it's your new favorite game of all time, and maybe it isn't stellar all the way through. Either way, the publisher sees that there's interest in titles using cel shading, games that contain a world generator, or have kick-ass soundtracks.

MASTER QUEST

In the history of the magazine, which games have gotten perfect 10s?

Evan Kirkpatrick
Via comcast.net

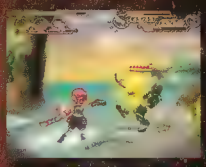
Of the nearly 3,000 games reviewed in the hallowed pages of this publication, only five have received a perfect 10. However, keep in mind that, in our old review format, the main score was based on an average of the three editors that reviewed a title. Therefore, games like Super Mario 64, which received a 10 from one – but not all – of the three reviewers are not recorded as 10s in our score archive. [Cue trumpet fanfare and drum roll] So, without further ado, the highest-scoring games in Game Informer history are:

Send your comments to Game Informer **Snail Mail:** Game Informer Magazine • Attn: Dear GI • 724 North First St., 4th Floor • Minneapolis, MN 55401 **Email:** deargi@gameinformer.com

DARK CLOUD 2

PlayStation 2

Take the first step in the sequel to one of the most epic quests ever. Dark Cloud 2. Create weapons. Invent gadgets. Restore the future by rebuilding the past with an enhanced Georama system that puts the fate of the world in your hands. Customize homes, surroundings and towns with virtually infinite possibilities, then see how they affect the future. But beware: Every action has a consequence.



TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD
PLAY IN OURS

www.playstation.com

Dark Cloud is a registered trademark of [illegible]
Dark Cloud 2 is a trademark of [illegible]

- Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (PS2)
- The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker (GC)
- Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (PS2)
- Metroid Fusion (GBA)
- Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 (PSone)

A few (but not all) of the games with the "Close But Still No Freakin' Cigar" award of 9.75 include:

- Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy Kong Quest (SNES)
- Final Fantasy VII and IX (PSone)
- Final Fantasy X (PS2)
- Half-Life: Counter-Strike (PC)
- The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask (N64)
- The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (N64)
- Madden NFL 2001 (PS2)
- Madden NFL 2002 (PS2)
- Master of Magic (PC)
- Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (PC)
- SimCity 4 (PC)
- Super Mario 64 (N64)
- Super Mario Sunshine (GC)
- Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 (PS2, GC, and Xbox)
- Xenosaga Episode 1 (PS2)

GET NEW FRIENDS

I have a problem: My best friend doesn't like your magazine. He thinks it's dumb. We actually stopped talking for a while because of this disagreement. What should I do to make him like your magazine?

Jon
Via aol.com

Obviously, we don't condone violence of any form, so the knee-jerk reaction of cutting off fingers until he agrees with your correct opinion is out of the question. As a secondary recommendation, have you tried an intervention (the kindest and most loving thing a friend can do)? It may go something like this:

YOU: "You know [insert friend's name here], we, your friends and family, are growing increasingly concerned for your well-being. We feel that you are just plain silly. How can you not like Game Informer? This has gone on for much too long."

FRIEND: "I don't need your approval!"

YOU: "But, [insert friend's name here], how can you not appreciate the timely cover stories, insightful reviews, and witty coverage of the gaming industry? That's only the tip of the GI information iceberg that comes to your mailbox each month."

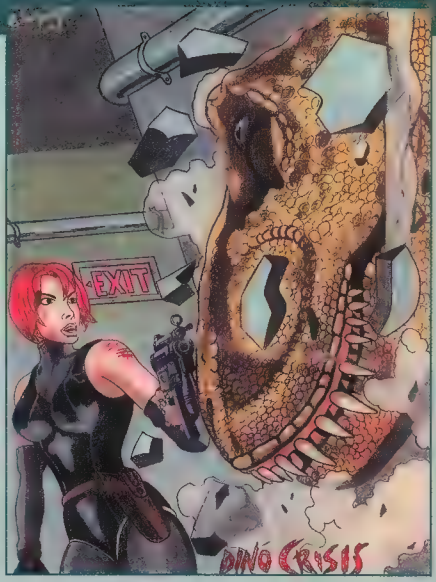
FRIEND: "No! GI is crap and they have poor math skills. Now I'm going to cut off your fingers until you agree with me!"

Sadly, the situation would then disintegrate into the aforementioned violence that we don't condone. Maybe you should just start with the fingers.

ENVELOPE ART

Leroy J. Gregory
He's back, and badder than ever. And by badder we mean not gooder

Charles M. Atkins
"My my, Ico. You're hefting some heavy lumber for a kid your age."



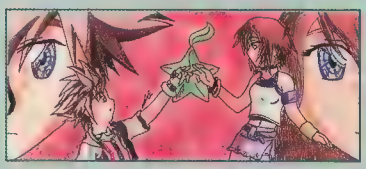
MAY WINNER!

Chijuyo
"I'm sorry, sir. You'll have to sit in the dentist office waiting room just like everyone else."

Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn envelope art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address on the back of the envelope. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault. Sorry, art cannot be returned.

Send to:
Game Informer
Envelope Art Contest
724 North First St., 4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401

Hubal Coffman
Do you think his spider sense tingles when someone leaves the toilet seat up?



Jason Osborne
It's a ménage à trois with Staryu from Pokémon!

Luis G. Cabera
We don't know who these other girls are, but they sure are purdy

ONLY FOR

12.2001

Space epic storms Japanese arcades... becomes #1 shooter of the year

09.2002

The phenomenon hits home on Sega Dreamcast ...overseas

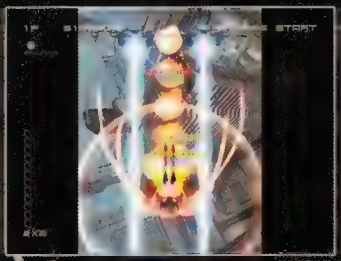
04.2003

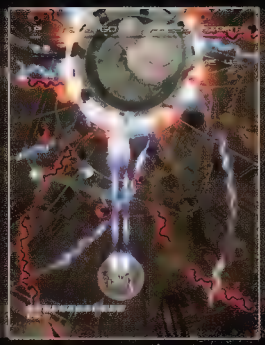
The cult hit comes to the U.S. for the first time...

斑鳩

IKARUGA™

"Our *frothing demand* for this game *increases.*"
—IGN.com





EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

VIOLENCE

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

TREASURE
VIDEO GAME

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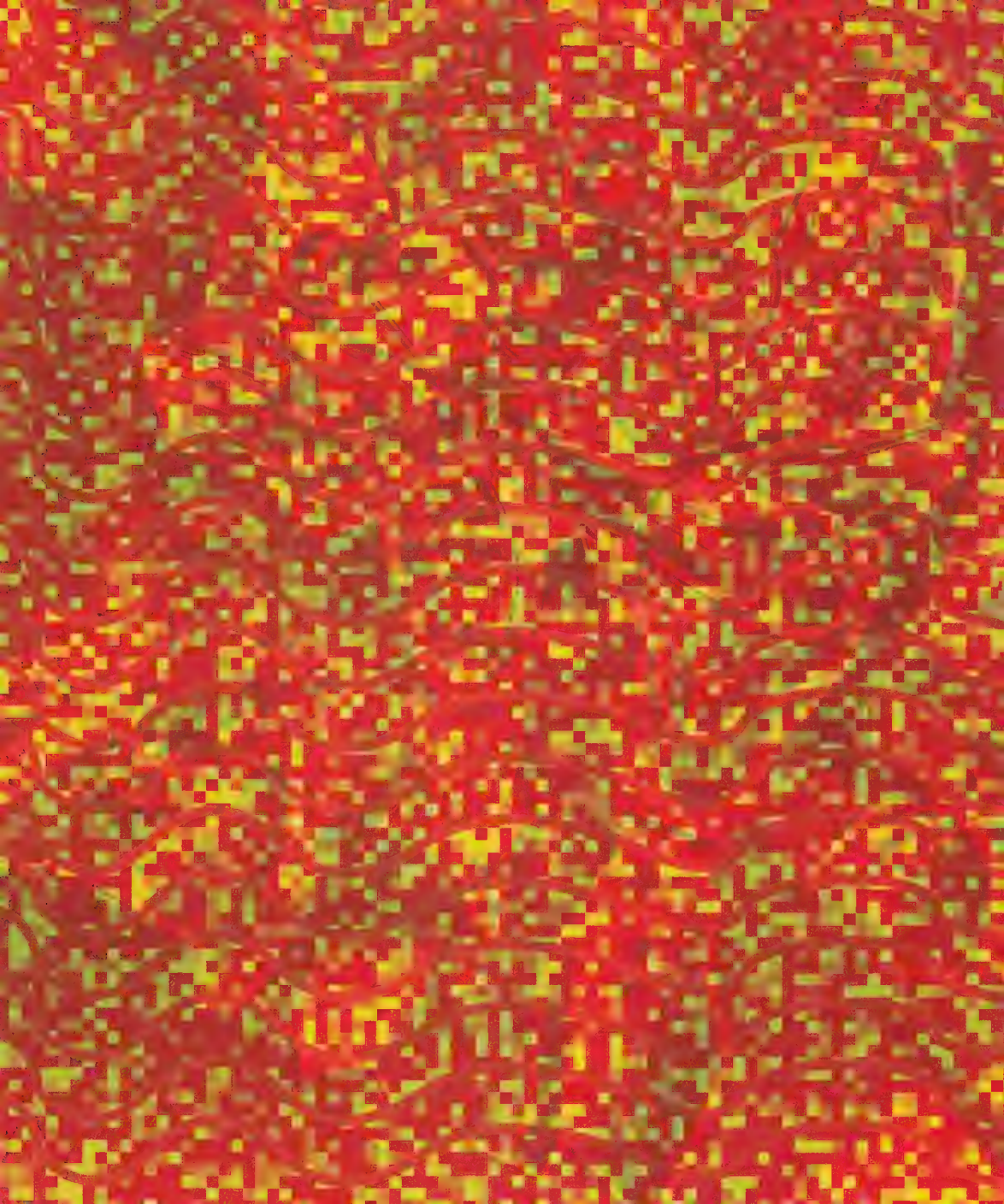
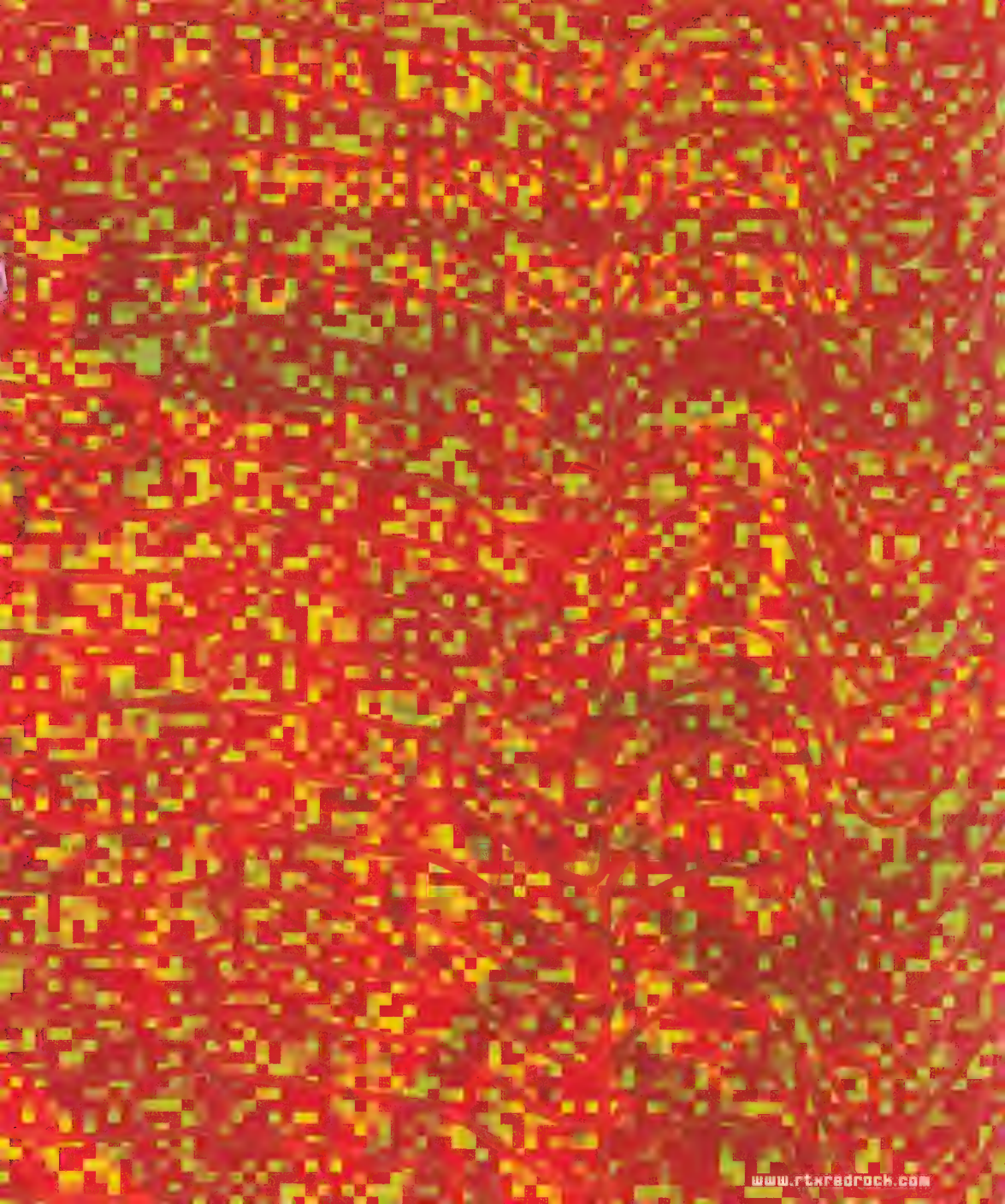
ATARI



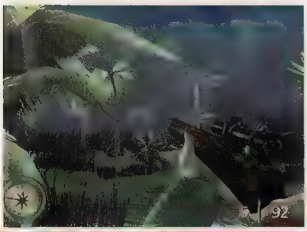

www.rtxredrock.com

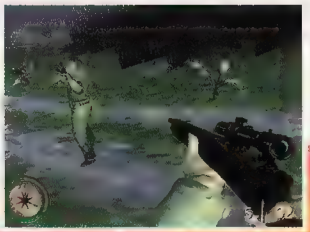
MEDAL OF HONOR BEGINS PACIFIC CAMPAIGN

"How fitting it is that we should gather here today on this hallowed ground," said Rick Giolito, the executive producer of ***Medal of Honor: Rising Sun***, at a recent event unveiling the game in San Francisco. "The Presidio: the staging ground for the Allied fight against the Japanese imperial war machine. Think of the hundreds of thousands of men and women who came through this [place] on their way to levels of heroism and sacrifice that most of us can only imagine." That's exactly what **Electronic Arts** is attempting to duplicate as it follows American soldiers into the Pacific theater this fall with *Rising Sun* for the **PlayStation 2**, **Xbox**, and **GameCube**.

This title ushers in many changes for the first-person series. Apart from inserting us into the war in the Pacific, *Rising Sun* will be the first of two episodes following the Griffin brothers. Players will start out as Marine corporal Joseph Griffin while he mans the guns and fights off the attack on Pearl Harbor. As the game progresses through Guadalcanal, the Philippines, and Burma, the brothers will become separated – enabling you to follow Donny's whereabouts in a future edition of *Medal of Honor* to appear next year.

The series has been retooled with a new graphics engine, animation system, and AI. "We just did not feel that the context and base that we had from [***Medal of Honor***] ***Frontline*** was sufficient to take on this challenge, so we have raised the bar there as well," says Giolito. During the title's 10 missions, players will find other surprises such as the freedom to maneuver off rail levels, find secret paths, garner plenty of rewards, complete secondary objectives, and more. In a first for the series, cooperative multiplayer will be available through the single-player campaign. Also, custom maps and weapons, as well as a four-player split-screen mode, are included.





All screens are from the PS2 version of Medal of Honor: Rising Sun

PC owners shall be called upon to do their duty, too. ***Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault*** will also start out at Pearl Harbor, but will consist of different locations and missions from *Rising Sun* when it releases this winter. Furthermore, ***Medal of Honor: Allied Assault Expansion Pack 2*** will cover the events in Italy and North Africa come summer.

HALO 2 DELAYED INDEFINITELY

Halo 2 developer **Bungie** has officially quashed any possibility that the **Xbox** game will hit store shelves this year. In a prepared statement, a spokesperson for the company said, "This game is a vast undertaking, considerably more complex than any of our previous efforts, and there is just no way to squeeze all of the necessary work into this calendar year." The exact nature of the hang-up is unknown. Halo 2 will be **Xbox Live** compatible, which may have played a role in the delay. Regardless, the developer says that it will give gamers a quick glimpse of the title next month at **E3** in Los Angeles.

What does **Microsoft** think of this? *Game Informer* asked **Ed Fries**, the head of Microsoft Games Division, who said he was behind the decision all the way. "I don't want to give those guys false deadlines. We're not going to ship this game until it's perfect."

EA STEALS NASCAR'S THUNDER

EA Sports and its ***NASCAR Thunder*** franchise will be the only car left on the track this year. The stock car racing organization's contract with all the video game companies expires this year, and EA rivals **Infogrames** (***NASCAR: Dirt to Daytona***) and **Sierra** (***NASCAR Racing*** series) will not release new versions of those games this year or for the foreseeable future.

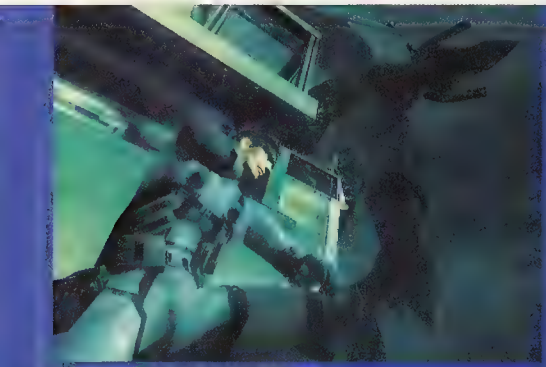
Although exact details on the negotiations between NASCAR and the three publishers are not being divulged, *Game Informer* has learned that part of the reason both Infogrames and Sierra may be withdrawing from the talks is that EA Sports may have simply outbid its competitors.

We spoke with **Owen Justice**, producer for *NASCAR: Dirt to Daytona* with developer **Monster Games**. "I think NASCAR would have liked to have had multiple companies running with the product," says Justice. "But there is a point at which EA offers up enough money – and nobody [else] is willing to offer that kind of dough – that NASCAR had to look at it and say, 'This is a better deal for us.' I think they're just looking for the best business deal."

Publishers Infogrames and Sierra were both reserved on the matter. The former simply said, "There are currently no plans to renew our NASCAR license," while the latter told us that it planned to move from **PC** to multiple consoles with a new, non-NASCAR racing product.

Ed Martin, Director of NASCAR production for *Thunder* developer **Tiburon**, says that even EA Sports is still negotiating with the organization to secure rights in the future. "Anything beyond *NASCAR Thunder 2004* [to release in calendar year 2003] for us or whatever Infogrames may be doing is speculation, because nobody has an agreement signed with NASCAR to go beyond 2004." Martin went on to say that the publisher is currently in negotiations for a contract extending past the next iteration.

The bottom line is this: The expenses of maintaining a popular sports license and the competitive market of the video game genre has forced out two viable competitors. What effect will this have on the quality of *NASCAR Thunder*? Will we see similar events occur with sports like football or basketball? One thing is certain: A lack of competition will likely not serve us, the consumer, or even EA Sports, very well.



Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty for PS2

NINTENDO SOLID WITH SNAKE & OLD FRIENDS

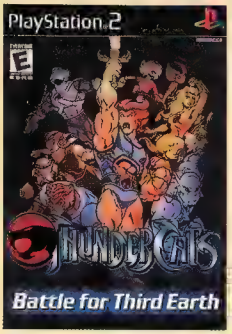
At a joint interview, **Konami** producer **Hideo Kojima** and famed **Nintendo** mastermind **Shigeru Miyamoto** shared plans to bring the epic espionage franchise ***Metal Gear Solid*** to the **GameCube**. Konami is expected to show the third installment in the series at **E3**, but it is unclear if the GameCube release will be the all-new, third *MGS*, or merely another port of ***Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty***. Details of the agreement between the two companies, such as whether it encompasses future titles in the franchise, are unknown at this time. Currently, there are rumors of an exclusive deal between the two, but this is unconfirmed.

Around the same time, Miyamoto leaked plans for new GameCube installments of ***Mario Kart***, ***Donkey Kong***, and ***Pokémon Stadium***. He said that the forthcoming *Stadium* title may be released in two versions, similar to the recent ***Pokémon Sapphire*** and ***Ruby*** titles for **Game Boy Advance**; and that the *Mario Kart* game promises several new innovations. Finally, he has also stated that Nintendo will be showing at least one new franchise at E3, along with a GBA title that allows players to capture and animate their own images – much like the original Game Boy Camera.

GI NEWS

Game Informer's research and development operatives search the globe, seeking out the untapped licenses that will become tomorrow's killer games. If you have any great ideas for games of the future, be sure to drop us a line. Maybe we'll use our godlike power over the video game industry to turn you into a millionaire – or just steal your idea.

THUNDERCATS: BATTLE FOR THIRD EARTH



With Konami investing in the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles license and Japanese developer Takara laboring away on a generation one Transformers game, it's only a matter of time before a company snags the rights to the '80s cult classic, *Thundercats*. Of course, given the content of the show, it's the perfect candidate for a combat-driven action/adventure theme and stylistic cel-shaded graphics. Players could suit up as a variety of familiar characters. Lion-O would specialize in hand-to-hand combat. Tygra's ability to turn invisible would come into play where stealth is needed. Cheetara's Psionic power could view events in the future – which would create a very unique gameplay element where players could preview an action and see the outcome before engaging in it. As for Panthro? He would pilot the Thunder Tank in a special stage where the team assaults Mumm-Ra's base. If you can picture Metal Gear Solid with a feline kick, you have a good idea as to what a Thundercats game would be like.

NAME THAT GAME

While the idea of three Canadian doctors joining forces to cure the world of sub-standard video games sounds like the premise for some crazy-ass TV show, it happened in real life. In 1995, MDs Muzyka, Zeschuk, and Yip banded together to form Bioware, and went on to release the Baldur's Gate series and Neverwinter Nights. Before these hits, what was the company's first game?

(Answer on page 32)

TOP 10 EXCUSES FOR WHY HALO 2 WAS DELAYED

10 Developer Bungie got sidetracked putting in a pillow fighting minigame

9 Bungie has been trying to steal ideas from Brute Force

8 Halo 2 requires the power of Xbox 2: And Blast Processing

7 Bill ran out of money

6 Microsoft didn't want to risk going up against Pigler's Big Game II this Christmas

5 Just fixing the driving physics on the vehicles has taken this long

4 Reiner stole the final code

3 Sony objected to having the game feature Jak and Daxter as shootable characters in the multiplayer arenas

2 Work is being done to add a Gomer Pyle voice to Xbox Live

1 The Master Chief ran off with one of the DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball girls

DEVELOPER TOP 5

JONATHAN CHIMURA
Associate Producer, Infogrames

(Jonathan is currently working on Kya for PS2)

1 Halo – Xbox

2 The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time – N64

3 Resident Evil – PSOne/ Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem – GC

4 Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty – PS2

5 Konami vs. [illegible] – [illegible]

READER TOP 5

MERVIN STODDART, JR.
Indianapolis, IN

1 Super Bomberman 2 – SNES

2 Rock n' Roll Racing – SNES

3 Tennis 2K2 – DC

4 Jet Grind Radio – DC

5 Metal Gear Solid – PS One

Game Informer is looking for your Top Five favorite games. Please send your Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine
Attn: Top Five
724 North First St., 4th Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55401
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

Every month a reader's Top Five will be selected and featured in the GI section, so send yours in!

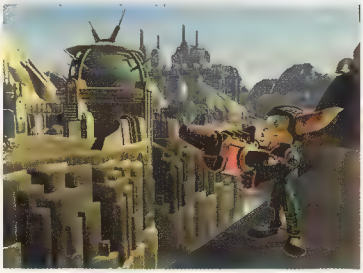
TRANSFORMERS MEETS THE EYE

Takara, a company that already manufactures **Transformers** toys, is publishing this **PlayStation 2** game in Japan this fall. ***Transformers*** is being developed by **WinkySoft**, and these first screens show that things appear to be going quite smoothly. Where's Bumblebee, you ask? On the other end of Star Scream's gun, we hope.

Transformers does not have an American publisher at the time of this writing, although *Game Informer* has heard that the property is close to being picked up. **E3** should disclose more about this exciting title.

FIRST LOOK: RATCHET & CLANK 2

Check out this first shot of **Sony's *Ratchet & Clank 2***. The sequel is again being developed by **Insomniac Games**. Of course, *Ratchet & Clank 2* will feature new worlds, weapons, and adventures for the pair. We can only hope that the pacing problems from the first can be ironed out, and then we'll be as happy as clams! Look for an official announcement regarding the game at **E3**. Where's Clank? Well, we imagine that separate adventures will again be the norm for the two, but we'd like to think he's actually a can of tuna now!



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

GOOD – **Nintendo** has confirmed that it is already working on a successor to the **Game Boy Advance** handheld. No release date or system specs are known yet.

BAD – After weaker-than expected holiday sales, **THQ** and **Activision** have reevaluated their priorities and cancelled several future projects. For THQ in particular, **GameCube** titles were the first to go. In this bad economy, other companies could follow suit and start to dis the console.

UGLY – Believe it or not, ex-**2 Live Crew** front man **Luke Campbell** is concerned about ***Grand Theft Auto III***. The rapper is mad that his real-life community of Liberty City (a suburb of Miami) is in the game. Of course, he's mainly pissed because, "I guarantee no one in Liberty City is making any money off this." Well, Luke, we know you're not getting dough making hit records anymore, either.

BAD – **LucasArts'** online adventure ***Star Wars Galaxies*** has been delayed from its April release due to the postponement of the third beta test. The game is now expected to come out for the **PC** sometime in June.

GOOD – Since spending some quality time together last issue while writing *Game Infarcer*, **Justin** and **Kristian** have decided to elope. Their contributions this month were actually ghost written by **Richard Kline** – better known as Larry from ***Three's Company***. Enjoy!

LOOSE TALK

Whenever there's a juicy rumor in the industry, Game Informer experts are on it like a fly on stink. If loose lips are spraying hot gossip, we're sucking up the secret saliva and drooling it all over this section. These leads may turn out to be 100% untrue, but then again, they could also be dead honest, and you've just learned about them months before anyone else! In the industry and need to get back at the boss who fired you by spilling some secrets? Email us at loosetalk@gameinformer.com and we'll be your shoulder to cry on.

Developer **Rare** is already hard at work for its new master, **Microsoft**. What's the **Xbox** buzzword? **Xbox Live**. What's one of Rare's biggest properties? ***Conker's***. These two seemingly dissimilar tastes will be brought together as the uncouth squirrel goes online for his next installment. You can bet that ***Perfect Dark*** online is also in the pipeline.

Gran Turismo 4 has been talked about for a while now, but what few know is that the series is going where it has never gone before – vehicle damage. The game is already heading online, and **Sony** hopes that – manufacturer's gripes aside – it can satiate fans' wishes with smashable rides. Developer **Polyphony** is also working on a secret project.

Midway's preparing a new lineup for the year, and guess who's not invited? ***Dr. Muto***, ***Haven***, and ***Defender*** were three retail disappointments that won't be asked back to the table.

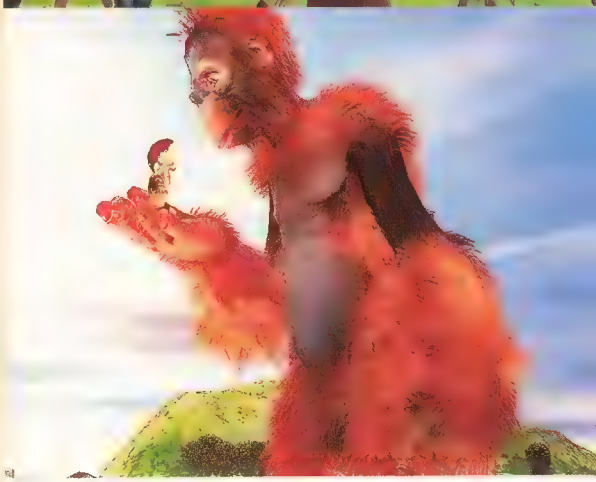
Developer **Zipper Interactive** is plowing full steam ahead with ***SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs II***, which will feature more urban environments, among other things. What's more, the studio has a first-person project up its sleeve that will take gamers into the future, and might even bump off ***Halo*** as the FPS console king.

Updating last month's *Loose Talk* on **Sony's *Arc the Lad: Twilight Spirits***, word is that the game could go online – which would be an exclusive feature for us American gamers.

GOD IS RETURNING – LOOK BUSY!

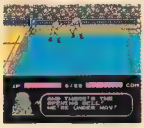
Peter Molyneux's Lionhead Studios, in conjunction with **Electronic Arts**, is once again handing you the reins of the world in ***Black & White 2*** for the **PC**. While Kristian seems to remember the first *Black & White's* logo screen the most, the rest of us were impressed with what a deep and complex game it was. The sequel is set to stretch the envelope even further when it releases this fall.

Now you can truly play the role of an angry god, as your creature will lead its followers into battle against heathen forces. Your people are also more independent, as their civilization and technology can reach greater heights. If all else fails, you can avail yourself of the new Epic Miracles. Earthquakes will rock the land, volcanoes can rise up and bathe your enemies in lava – you know, all the good stuff that **Charlton Heston** only wishes he could do.



VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

May 12 is Mother's Day, people. We're telling you in advance, so you can go out and get her a well thought-out present for once. After all, she birthed you, cooked for you, and kept you from sticking pencils too far up your nose. Let us take a moment to remember her and all she's done. What's your fondest memory of your mother? Take this month's trivia to find out!



QUESTION 1: Which 8-bit wrestling game features an announcer at the bottom of the screen who constantly barks out match commentary?
A. World Championship Wrestling
B. Tecmo World Wrestling
C. Tag Team Wrestling
D. M.U.S.C.L.E.

QUESTION 2: Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball may not feature full-frontal nudity, but it has some very revealing swimwear. One suit costs a million and merely consists of a few well-placed jewels. What is this bikini called?
A. Venus
B. The Family Jewels
C. Athena
D. Tuna

QUESTION 3: Before home computers and MIDI were commonplace, bands like DEVO had to use something else to craft electronic music. This device, created in 1978, used a cassette drive to store 12,500 notes, which had to be entered numerically. What was its name?
A. Jock 8-B Synthesizer
B. Casio Mark 12.5
C. Roland MC-4 Sequencer
D. SP-78 ElectriCord Pro

QUESTION 5: Super Mario Bros. 2 is one of the few entries in the blockbuster platforming series where Bowser/King Koopa wasn't the main antagonist. Who was the big meanie final boss that Mario and friends battled in this classic?
A. Tri-Clyde
B. Zapper
C. Shaman Shyguy
D. Wart

QUESTION 6: In Animal Crossing, pelicans run the post office. Pete delivers mail and the ladies trade shifts in the office. The sweet one is Pelly. Who is her grumpier, grouchy co-worker?
A. Grizelda
B. Phyllis
C. Pazley
D. Mrs. Poole

QUESTION 7: NBA Street has an outspoken announcer who presides over the courts. He was originally going to be toned down in NBA Street Vol. 2, but ended up being replaced altogether. What is this mouthpiece's name?
A. Airball
B. MC Brains
C. Tommy "Hoops" Hooper
D. Joe the Show

QUESTION 8: The Nintendo e-Reader isn't the first gaming accessory to involve the scanning of coded cards. In this portable console from the early 1990s, gamers scan ordinary barcodes off everyday objects. It would then craft a fighting character based on the random numbers in the UPC symbol. What was this failed device called?
A. Barcode Battler
B. UPC Swapper
C. Consumer Fighter
D. ScanTron 5000

QUESTION 9: Working Designs' Magic Knight Rayearth, one of the last Sega Saturn games, starred three anime heroines summoned to save the world. You can switch your control between them at the tap of a button. Which name is not one of the sweet trio of warriors?
A. Fuu
B. Geki
C. Hikaru
D. Umi

QUESTION 10: Nintendo's two most popular NES games teamed up for the Nintendo Cereal System. The commercial jingle went, "Nintendo, it's for breakfast now. Nintendo, it's a cereal – wow! Nintendo, Super Mario jumps. Nintendo, in a fruit-flavored crunch. Nintendo, there's Zelda, too." What was the next line?
A. It's berry good news!
B. Link's good for you!
C. In marshmallow goo!
D. Cure your NES blues!

Score & Rank

0 Giving her a surprise "baby shower" while she changed your diaper

1-3 Being your date to the junior prom

4-6 Buying you that pair of moonboots you always wanted

7-9 Helping you escape from prison

10 Giving you a big hug when you really needed it

Video Game Trivia Answers: 1.B 2.A 3.C 4.C 5.D 6.B 7.D 8.A 9.B 10.A

EIDOS HAS AN ITALIAN JOB FOR YOU

Eidos has revealed that it has snagged the rights to make next-gen video games based on the film remake of ***The Italian Job***. The original film featured **Michael Caine** as cockney crook Charlie Croker, but now the role has gone to **Mark Wahlberg**. The new movie is expected in theaters this summer, while the vid should be out during the same time. Gameplay details are scarce right now, but maybe there's a minigame where you can tip those wee-little cars over, or use their sunroofs as a late night urinal.

Meanwhile, Eidos' **Crystal Dynamics** studio is also preparing ***Spanx*** and ***Soul Reaver 3***, both for the **PlayStation 2**. The latter game is rumored to feature both Raziel and Kain.

BREAK DOWN

73% of the office's cookies were eaten by Kristian – not that he'd ever admit it. He also won't confess that he sometimes eats half a cookie, and leaves the rest – knowing nobody else will eat the other half

9% of the country's Internet traffic is due to online gaming, according to a recent survey by a technology analyst

31% of this month's Gallop Racer 2003 horses were put out to pasture or given cushy jobs at the local glue factory

85% of games by publishers who refuse to send us early review copies are usually stinkers. They'd rather us not play them in order to avoid bad press

10% of Xbox owners have hooked into Xbox Live

BREATH OF FIRE

DRAGON QUARTER™

FROM BENEATH THE SURFACE A SECRET HIDDEN FOR EONS IS ABOUT TO BE REDISCOVERED

- A BRAND NEW EVOLUTION OF THE BREATH OF FIRE SERIES
- NEW REAL-TIME, TURN-BASED BATTLE-SYSTEM
- 3-D WORLDS EVOLVE TO SUIT YOUR PLAYING STYLE

T TEEN CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Partial Nudity
Violence

PlayStation.2

CAPCOM

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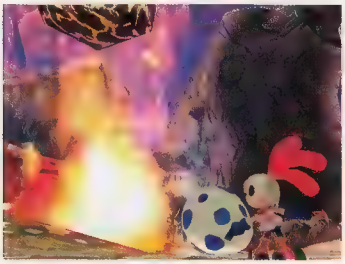
SEGA SPREADS LOVE

Game Informer is here to give you a sneak peek at some of the goodies that **Sega** has in store for you this year – including tasty exclusives for each console. Perhaps the most intriguing of them all is **Yuji Naka** and **Sonicteam's** newest brainchild, ***Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg*** for the **GameCube**. Here you collect, carry, and hatch eggs to defuse traps and to unleash each creature's special power.

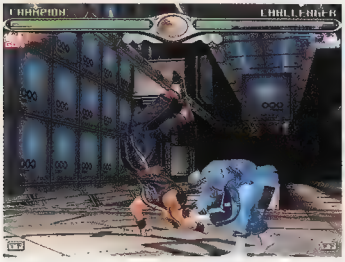
The **Xbox**, meanwhile, will be treated to the **From Software**-developed ***Otogi: Myth of Demons***. Similar to other titles from the studio, Otogi will be a mix of action-intensive combat and RPG customization. To this end, the game features 25 destructible environments, 30 weapons, and 12 types of magic.

Also appearing on the Xbox, as well as the **PlayStation 2**, is the return of **Jack Wade** in ***Headhunter: Redemption***. He's got some company with him this time, and we're not just talking about the return of the motorcycle (although that's back and capable of more exploration than ever). **Leeza X** is his apprentice, and she'll help split the adventure into two distinct storylines.



Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg (GameCube)

Otogi: Myth of Demons (Xbox)



Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution Greatest Hits (PS2)

Exclusive to the **PlayStation 2** are ***Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution Greatest Hits***, ***Virtual On Marz***, ***Altered Beast***, and ***Vectorman***. The VF series returns with two new characters, as well as a Quest mode, additional moves, and 1,500 costume items. The latter two games, meanwhile, are blasts from the past that are receiving some major facelifts this side of the year 2000. ***Vectorman*** returns to his third-person shooting ways, while we can only hope this new ***Altered Beast*** keeps the haunting "RISE FROM YOUR GRAVE!" soundbite.

SEGA'S UPCOMING LINEUP

- ***Sonic Pinball Party*** (GBA) – June 3
- ***Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution Greatest Hits*** (PS2) – August
- ***Otogi: Myth of Demons*** (Xbox) – September
- ***Virtual On Marz*** (PS2) – October
- ***Headhunter: Redemption*** (PS2/Xbox) – Fall
- ***Altered Beast*** (PS2) – Fall
- ***Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg*** (GameCube) – Fall
- ***Vectorman*** (PS2) – January 2004

DATA FILE

➤ Developer **Luxoflux** is currently busy with **Activision's** ***True Crime: Streets of LA***, but *Game Informer* has been told that another unnamed project is also in the works. Could this be a next-gen version of ***Vigilante 8***?

➤ A movie is in the works based on ***Onimusha*** from **Capcom**. Will it star ***Onimusha 3*** hero/actor **Jean Reno**? We don't know, however, producer **Keiji Inafune** promises us that the film won't be "just some bad video game-to-movie conversion."

➤ Fresh out of wowing gamers with ***Xenosaga Episode 1***, developer **Monolith Soft** has stated that it is already planning an all-new RPG adventure for the **PlayStation 2** and **GameCube**.

➤ **Ubi Soft** has stepped up and snagged the rights to **Sony of Japan's** ***Ape Escape 2***. The French company plans to have the title ready for release this summer.

➤ Flying high off of ***Grand Theft Auto***, **Take 2 Interactive** is definitely letting success go to its head. The company is considering adding children's games, sports titles, and even a wireless division to its plate.

➤ U.K. developer **SCi Games** has been given the green flag to produce video games based on **Quentin Tarantino's** ***Reservoir Dogs***. You can bet your black suit that you'll be able to play as Mr. Blonde.

➤ **Sony** is giving developers a helping hand in creating and maintaining online games. Through a deal with **Butterfly.net**, it will be cheaper and easier for game makers to produce online titles for the **PlayStation 2**. Currently, there are nine games being developed through Butterfly.

➤ **ATI Technologies** has struck a deal with **Nintendo** to produce a graphics chipset for future products. Currently, ATI makes the "Flipper" chip used in the **GameCube**.

➤ The game formerly known as ***Sea Dogs II*** is now opting for the more sea-worthy moniker of ***Pirates of the Caribbean***. Arr! Dat blows!

➤ **Final Fantasy** producer **Yoshinori Kitase** revealed that ***Final Fantasy XII*** is nearing completion, but he did not set a release timetable. Meanwhile, the notion of a second spin-off for ***Final Fantasy X*** was shot down.

➤ **Acclaim's** ***Gladiator*** has changed its name to ***Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance***.

Name That Game Answer: Shattered Steel

LARA'S NEW LOOK

Here's an early glimpse of Tomb Rai...umm...***Lara Croft: Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life***. That's better. The summer movie has **Angelina Jolie** reprising her role as video gaming's famous relic hunter.

We don't know a lot about the actual plot, but if these pictures are any indication, maybe she's gone to find out where it all went wrong between her and **Billy Bob Thornton** (she's frantically searching on bike). It looks like she gives up her futile quest, however, and stops by a local plastic surgeon (turn left at Angkor Wat) to contemplate getting some more work done. Finally, it all ends in tears when a stray poodle (not the miniature kind, mind you) bites her arm. We kid, we kid. Enjoy.

EA HOOKS UP NINTENDO

Nintendo is trying to get more **GameCube** games to utilize the **Game Boy Advance**, and it has struck gold with **Electronic Arts**. EA has agreed to provide at least 20 titles using the platforms' unique connectivity feature. The first properties will be ***Madden NFL 2004***, ***Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004***, and ***FIFA 2004***. Future games will not only be EA Sports franchises, but EA BIG and EA Games properties as well.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

THE PLAYSTATION®2 GREATEST HIT IS NOW COMING TO THE XBOX™ WITH ALL NEW MULTIPLAYER MODES

TOPPLE THE CORPORATION OR CAUSE COMPLETE MAYHEM

PREPARE FOR CHAOS AS HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE FILL THE SCREEN - EACH CITIZEN REACTS DIFFERENTLY TO EVENTS

GO HEAD TO HEAD WITH UP TO 3 FRIENDS ON ALL NEW MULTIPLAYER MODES EXCLUSIVE TO THE XBOX™

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Violence

PlayStation.2

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*MANUFACTURER'S SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE FOR BOTH XBOX™ AND PLAYSTATION®2 GREATEST HITS

POINTE

COUNTER STRIKE

■ **FORMAT** XBOX/PC ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (EXACT MULTIPLAYER TBA) ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** VALVE/RITUAL ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** MAY (PC), FALL (XBOX)

The Organic Game

Organic game development – the idea of constantly evolving a title online for little or no profit – would seem to require a dedication of time and resources that most companies lack. It sounds ridiculous, but this has been Valve's approach to its online hit Counter-Strike for the PC. You might be curious as to how developer Valve can afford to do this and what it possibly gains. First, it doesn't directly hand out its product to anyone. Counter-Strike is a mod based on Valve's classic first-person shooter Half-Life, created by a fan named Minh Le – who now happens to work for Valve (and is interviewed on pg. 40). So, in order to enjoy Counter-Strike, you must own a version of Half-Life. But once you make that initial purchase, everything else can be downloaded for absolutely free. So far, sales of Half-Life have been enough to sustain the company's work towards perfecting Counter-Strike's online experience.

Second, much of CS's content is generated by the community, which is the true driving force behind the game's constant growth and appeal. The quality is therefore dictated by the fan base to a great degree. Valve representative, Doug Lombardi, states, "This is the community's game, not ours." That said, Valve does police the content to some degree, removing certain additions that may have initially seemed like good ideas, but don't end up working out. Lombardi continues, "We've gone through a countless number of additions that simply never catch on. We are not afraid to remove something if the players don't like it."

Valve's "community-first" ethic also earns it something far greater than immediate monetary profit. Its investment in the fans has gained it respect and loyalty. Counter-Strike gets two-and-a-half million players monthly, a figure that stands as indisputable proof of the game's lasting appeal.

Xbox Magic

Counter-Strike has clearly proven itself on PC, but the question remains: Will the Xbox version be able to duplicate that magic? At first, most of us would guess that Microsoft is silly if it thinks CS will garner similar attention. These critics would claim that the Xbox lacks the versatility of the PC. That is true in some ways, but Valve, Microsoft, and Ritual (the developer of the new Xbox and PC versions) are emphatically dedicated to keeping CS a title for the hardcore fan, giving it a flexibility that's unprecedented in online console gaming. Tools for standard PCs will be available to the public to create and design mods and maps. Once you complete a project, you submit it to Valve, who will ensure its legitimacy (meaning it isn't a cheat) and quality. If your creation passes the test, Valve will post it as an available download for any Xbox user.

Valve and Ritual also want to extend the software to include the ability for online teams (known as clans on PC) to create their own symbol. During matches, each player can spray-paint his or her team's symbol on anything in the environment. It's nothing particularly pertinent to gameplay, but it certainly heightens the sense of camaraderie felt within communities.

Unfortunately, Counter-Strike's community will be hindered on Microsoft's end. The networking component will be

New enemies also sport new kinds of weapons. These guys will suddenly emerge from behind objects

The single-player game will feature vehicles which you can ride and sometimes shoot from

limited to Xbox Live's current features, which means that networking between teams and other clans will prove cumbersome for players, but only for a short while. Representatives from Microsoft revealed that it didn't design Live as a static entity. Rather, it too will be enhanced.

Although they couldn't officially elaborate, they shot us a sly smile when questions regarding the possibility of chat rooms arose, like the PC's IRC (Internet Relay Chat). An IRC program (complete with headset capabilities) would empower console gamers with the final tool they require to establish the online gaming community that PC owners have enjoyed for years.

One's Enough

By now you're probably tired of hearing about peripheral features that don't speak directly of the gameplay that's so competitive and addicting that some unfortunate clans have actually met to fight in reality! Unless you count Half-Life, Counter-Strike has traditionally been an online-only title that pits a terrorist team against a counter-terrorist group in different types of maps and game modes. But before we explain the wonders of CS's enhanced multiplayer action, we must disclose even more exciting news. Ritual is developing a new sort of CS – one that even the most rabid players have yet to experience: a single-player game.

Although this new version, dubbed Counter-Strike: Condition Zero, will appear first on PC in May, Ritual will release an enhanced and renamed Xbox iteration this fall. Essentially, Xbox owners will receive all of the previous online material, Condition Zero's single-player content, two new solo missions, exclusive multiplayer maps, significantly improved graphics, and standardization (that is, all gamers are on equal footing, since there's only one hardware format).

The game will consist of over 20 missions taking place in numerous countries against unique terrorists. Furthermore, players will assume the role of no specific character or team. You'll play as an anonymous person in seven different counter-terrorist groups from the SAS (British) and GSG9 (German) to American and French special forces. Indeed, your suspicions are correct: There's no predominant plot that cohesively ties each scenario together. So, you might perceive the entire game as composed of individual cells with congruent themes.

Each single-player mission might have its own story, but it will also have unique gameplay features

The terrorists accurately represent the area you're playing in

Ritual understands and accepts that the lack of an all-encompassing story will expel the player from the experience upon completion of a mission. However, divesting itself of this typically necessary element grants the team the freedom to focus on creating a product that's engaging almost solely through everyone's favorite component: gameplay. Since each cell will feature different environments, protagonists, enemies, and objectives; boredom will be kept to a minimum.

Counter Terror-ific Gameplay

Ritual has endowed each setting with extreme amounts of detail. So when you're in the subways of Japan, you'll be exposed to a believable atmosphere, both visually and aurally. Japanese businessmen, uniformed school children, the special bumpy walkways for the blind, and terrorists speaking in Japanese will help lend the game a convincing level of detail.

The environment type also dictates your objectives, and in many cases, your arsenal and special gadgets. For example, the Miami bank robbery places you in a squad of SWAT troopers who must secretly infiltrate the bank via underground tunnels and quietly proceed to neutralize the criminals individually to prevent any loss of civilian life. Up until the exciting finale, this scenario mostly requires stealth, so you'll have a limited arsenal of weapons, but a host of high-tech goodies like a fiber-optic camera. Other maps, like High Rise, focus on overcoming obstacles and puzzles such as jumping from ledge to ledge around the periphery of the building and riding on zip lines. Of course, Ritual will make certain to include sections that are all about mayhem. The levels featuring a runaway cargo ship and the Colombian jungle exemplify just how insanely chaotic CS can get. In the former mission, players must stop a ship armed with a nuclear bomb before it crashes into the North American coast. Obviously inspired by games like Doom, you're thrust into close-corridor combat and given a diverse set of weapons, as well as plenty of health pick-ups and targets to obliterate.

To further diversify gameplay, Ritual has devised a few levels with content that will surprise even diehard, longtime fans. The most interesting of these puts you in the role of an undercover agent who must close a deal with a drug lord in a very disgusting Modesto crack house! Similar to the cargo ship, the pacing of this stage is frantic, as you must chase down the lord, while carefully disposing of his henchmen along the way.

In a standoff, directing your allies to strategically take out enemies is required

The environments are quite varied – from snow to jungle to high rises!

The Little Things

If you're even remotely familiar with the PC product, you know that certain subtle, yet integral, aspects of gameplay are incompatible with a one-player experience. Ritual promises that it will address these issues. First, damage taken from enemies isn't realistic; body armor, health, and other items and weapons are sprinkled around without the usual purchasing interface. Lombardi emphasizes, "This isn't about showing how tough we can make our game. We want the player to have fun."

Second, and most importantly, Ritual has already spent considerable time balancing ally and enemy AI.

Enemies have customized AI routines to put up a challenge

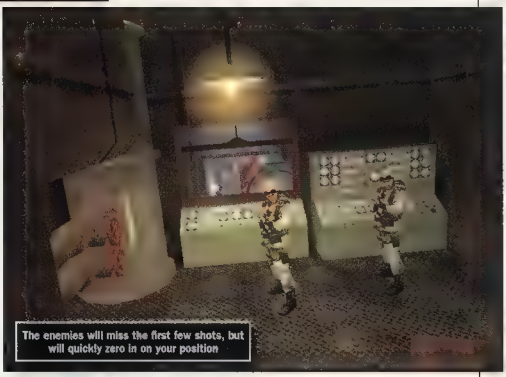
Based on our time with this new Counter-Strike, we can confirm that allies fight adeptly without too much direction, which, in juxtaposition, is often a headache in many of Ubi Soft's Tom Clancy titles. So, when you encounter a situation, your comrades usually understand their role and execute it properly. However, they aren't impervious bots. If you completely neglect them, one or two will sometimes perish.

The counter-terrorists are varied in single-player. Hopefully, you can use them in multiplayer, too

Fortunately – or unfortunately – your enemies aren't dumb, either. Ritual has actually written many AI routines for a wide variety of situations. Sometimes, enemies will quickly roll across an opening, fire, and then continue their roll for cover. Other times, they'll blindly shoot around corners, exposing only their arm. If you encounter a terrorist head-on, you'll quickly realize that they even aim based on a specific routine that lead designer, Tom Mustaine, describes as a cone. He'll start to shoot in a pattern that encircles your protagonist, with the apex being at the gun's nozzle. As time passes, the imaginary cone grows progressively more narrow until it eventually becomes a straight line centered on your character. The game's difficulty setting determines, in part, how fast the cone closes.

Most interestingly, fellow terrorists will actually aid each other to an extent that opens the game for more strategy. We know this sounds slightly sadistic, but let's take a stalemate encounter as an example. If you can manage to draw a terrorist into the open and injure him, another enemy will sometimes attempt to rescue the fallen comrade. When he does, you have free reign to dispose of both.

As you can see, Valve and Ritual have gone to great lengths to make CS a legitimate single-player FPS on par with any others in the genre. However, both companies realize that this title's staying power lies in its online component, which Ritual has sought to enhance for console players and newbies, while preserving the hectic action that devoted PC players expect.



The enemies will miss the first few shots, but will quickly zero in on your position

Multiplayer Mayhem

For newbies only: If you're a veteran, skip this section.

As you can infer from previous sections, the online portion features some notable differences. Players choose either the side of terrorists or counter-terrorists, who each have certain objectives depending on the type of game you select. The more successful you are at completing objectives while avoiding death and maximizing kills, the more money you earn; which you then spend on weapons, items, and armor at the beginning of matches.

Ritual is also kicking around the idea of making the bosses, like the drug lord, available online

There are four main games: Hostage Rescue, Bomb Defuse, Assassination, and Escape. However, the first two are by far the most popular among PC players. Hostage Rescue requires the counter-terrorist group to locate hostages and lead them to predefined rescue points; killing all of the terrorists will also result in victory. If the terrorists stop you first, they win.

Bomb Defuse charges terrorists to plant and detonate a bomb, while the opposing team must either off each terrorist or defuse the explosive device. At the start of a match, one terrorist is randomly assigned the role of bomb carrier. That player must locate the designated area with his or her team and ensure that it explodes. If the carrier dies, another team member can pick up the bomb and continue the objective.

In Assassination, one counter-terrorist is designated the VIP. He possesses a limited arsenal and cannot acquire any weapons within the environment. The VIP must successfully reach an extraction point under the protection of other counter-terrorists. Of course, this isn't an easy task, as every terrorist in the game is gunning for a clean headshot.

The final mode, Escape, is quite basic and boring; and as a result, receives the least attention. In short, this simple game has only one objective: Terrorists must flee to an evacuation area, while the counter-terrorists simply need to prevent this from happening.

As previously stated, Valve encourages creative players to program their own mods, so numerous other games exist for the PC Counter-Strike, such as Knife Arena, Grenade Fight, Close Quarters, and Sniper. Ritual won't include any of these with the retail package on Xbox. But, since it and Valve will also permit fans to mod the console Counter-Strike, you can rest assured that even if they only gain a modest following, all sorts of imaginative game modes will spring up.

Not having a specific identity at least opens the door for variety

> "...this is a different kind of shooter on the Xbox. I think that it's something that people have been looking for." TOM MUSTAINE

INTERVIEW: Tom Mustaine Lead Designer at Ritual Studios

How did Ritual start?
Initially, the founders of the company were all developers. No one really had a management role. We worked on a game called Scourge of Armageddon, which was an add-on pack for Quake. We then made a single-player game called Sin. After that, we worked on Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 for Gathering of Developers. Next, we started doing projects for EA, some of which didn't make it. We most recently helped them with Agent Under Fire. From that point, we went to work on Star Trek: Elite Force II and Counter-Strike: Condition Zero. The team has grown from a mere seven people to about 53 in seven years. We've come quite a way.

What is the most significant change you made to Counter-Strike for the console audience?
We have made a lot of considerations for Xbox, but especially how the gameplay in the levels flow. There is less of a vertical playfield and more of a horizontal one.

What do you think that the PC version's biggest flaws are, and did you address these for Xbox?
I think that from a gameplay perspective, the PC is pretty solid. One of the hardest problems on the PC was our software limitation. We actually couldn't push as much visual fidelity as we would have liked on the PC. The Xbox version is going to be a lot better because we can guarantee our target. That helps.

As gamers, have you learned anything from other first-person shooters that will make this game better?
When it comes to other shooters, they tend to raise the bar across the board – for gameplay, visual fidelity, immersion, and all that stuff. We like to push the bar two or three times beyond that.

What kind of a success do you think that Counter-Strike will be on the Xbox?
Counter-Strike on Xbox will be a success because of the mixture of single-player and multiplayer elements. Also, in general, this is a different kind of shooter on the Xbox. I think that it's something that people have been looking for. It offers some of the realistic, tactical flare; yet at the same time, it's not so tight-knit into that realistic universe, so you can still have fun with it.

Do you think that it will be bigger than the PC version?
I think that depends on the number of Xbox Live players. If more Xbox Live subscriptions get up there, we can get a decent number of people to pick up Counter-Strike. I'd like to say that we're going to be one of the killer apps for Xbox Live. That's been our target and that's been our goal.

How do you feel about this game's huge popularity and people who've actually fought over the game in real life?
Working on a product this big is interesting, especially when you realize that there's a community who takes it very seriously. There are tournaments with prizes of two and three hundred thousand dollars! People are playing for keeps. It's tough from a developer's perspective not to blame your game when people go out and do stupid things. People have been doing stupid things since the beginning of time, and I know that I can't take responsibility for those actions. As far as having this many people to answer to, it's actually a good feeling. You know that there's a lot of people out there that – regardless of whether they like what you do – are still going to say something. But I think that, in general, people are going to be pleased with our work.

Do you ever feel any pressure from the fan base?
I don't think that kind of pressure's bad. I think that pressure helps raise the bar. Having that many people to answer to makes us pay close attention to certain things. We don't want to alienate our audience, but at the same time we're trying to add new members.

WEAPONS

Here are the weapons; some are new and some are old

INTERVIEW: Minh Le *Creator of Counter-Strike*

Why did the first iterations of Counter-Strike require players to shoot left-handed?
Being a left-handed person myself, I find it much more intuitive to model and animate my weapon models as left-handed. In the earlier versions, we didn't have a system of mirroring the models effectively, so players were forced to see the world from the perspective of the true dominant species of the world – that is, left-handed people! [Laughs]

What inspired you to create the mod? Why use the Half-life engine?
I was inspired by various sources such as video games like Virtua Cop and movies such as *Air Force One*, *The Professional*, and *Ronin*. Half-Life was the definitive choice for me because it offered a lot of great features that were lacking in other games (like skeletal animation), and it had a semi-realistic setting so I didn't have to overhaul all of the graphics.

What is it like doing this job as a career versus a hobby?
There are many more responsibilities. The fact that I get paid for what I enjoy doing is a definite plus.

How far do you want to take Counter-Strike? What are you currently working on for it?
I'd like to take it as far as I'm interested in the concept. I just enjoy designing games on the latest engines, with all the new technological advances, and seeing how much more immersive I can make the experience with better graphics, sound, animation, and game design.

Can you give us some of your personal history in gaming?
I'm 25 years old and I got into gaming when I was about seven or eight. My dad bought us a Vic-20, and ever since then we've been upgrading computers as newer systems became available.

What are some of your favorite games of all time?
That's a hard one to answer, but some that stick out in my mind are Rambo (Commodore 64), Beachhead (C64), Karateka (IBM XT), Ultima 7, Betrayal at Krondor, the Police Quest series, Doom I and II, Quake I and II, Duke Nukem, and Metal Gear Solid.

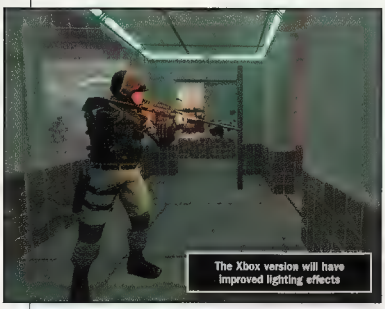
Have you ever been recognized by any CS fans? How does that make you feel?
Yes, a couple of times. I was at a Club Monaco, a clothing store, and one of the guys recognized me from a television interview that I did. It turns out that the guy also graduated from my high school as well. It was pretty embarrassing, yet flattering at the same time. I've also walked into some LAN cafes and received some odd glances. I reckon they might have recognized me, or just thought I looked odd or something. It's hard to tell.

480P for HDTVs will be offered in the Xbox version as well as Dolby 5.1!

Multiplayer Advanced

If the solo missions spark little interest, current CS players should consider Condition Zero yet another update in an already expansive PC game. Like previous mods, much of Condition Zero's multiplayer material will be available through a patch. Remember, however, only the retail version will offer the mission mode and the myriad graphical enhancements. The new features include 10 maps, the ability to attach a flashlight on the assault rifle and shotgun, and four original weapons (M60 machine gun, Famas Rifle, Galil Rifle, and Ballistic Shield) – the most exciting of which is the shield. When you engage it, you can deflect bullets, but only from the player's front side! This nifty device obviously greatly affects gamers' approach to Bomb Defuse and Assassination, since teammates can now devise battle plans around defensive tactics. Shields are also used in conjunction with a pistol, hopefully making one-on-one showdowns an intense trial of skill and grit. Although, two timid players could potentially make such encounters more of a test of patience.

As previously mentioned, Xbox owners will receive a Counter-Strike that contains all the previous material and Condition Zero, as well as new weapons and maps. The exclusive Xbox weapons merely consist of the Syringe (accessible only in single-player) and Machete. Ritual promises it will compensate for its lack of exclusive weapons by adding at least five multiplayer maps.



The Xbox version will have improved lighting effects

The character models and environment benefit from more polygons

Ritual will even alter many of the levels that are already present. Because the analog sticks simply cannot match the precision inherent to the mouse/keyboard configuration, the geometry of levels will focus players on horizontally-oriented action, rather than a combination of horizontal and vertical – thereby completely alleviating the controller issue for the console-only audience. The developers will also address the controller's lack of keys to make accessing menus and items more practical. First, users can configure their weapon preferences based on those they employ most. Second, hotkeys will be available through analog functionality; that is, you'll access a weapon or menu by completely depressing a button and waiting a split second. Ritual admits that it hasn't yet worked out every kink in the interface, but guarantees it will. Mustaine assures, "It's a shame. So many games could've been great if the developers just eliminated that one nagging issue. We will not let this happen to our product."

Although the developers will also need to redesign the online network for Xbox, for the most part, this actually benefits the end product thanks to standardization. Since everyone will possess the same hardware (CPU, controller, and headset) and use a broadband connection, nobody can complain about an unfair advantage, assuming that each player is within a reasonable distance to the host. Plus, all will play over the same closed network, which eliminates many of the headaches – like cheating – that constantly plague the PC. Most types of cheaters that are normally able to gain access and ruin games (PC users call them idlers and PKers) will be kept in check. Valve has written programs within the software that automatically kicks these nuisances from servers. If, for example, you shoot your teammates or stand still for too long, your butt's out!

The only disadvantage to playing on Xbox is server size. Ritual will strive to make 10-versus-10 matches possible, but it'll most likely limit games to a maximum capacity of 16. However, in reality this isn't a significant disappointment, as most professional clans only participate in matches with teams of five.

Graphical Flair (Or Lack Of?)

The game's appearance is the least important aspect of its quality. Still, many gamers place considerable value in graphics; and for that audience, they might be disappointed in Counter-Strike. Instead of diverting time and resources to creating the best-looking Xbox software ever, Ritual wants to ensure that the game A) plays well, and B) runs fast over the Internet. But to say that the graphics are bad is an insult to Ritual's art team. The environments, weapons, and character models feature 60 to 70 percent more polygons than previous iterations. To further enhance the characters' realism, Ritual added thousands of new action animations and tens of thousands of frames! The Xbox version, in particular, will receive 24-bit texture quality, significantly better lighting and particle effects, and flashier color schemes.

Surprisingly, the developers will even go a step further, creating scripted events that are meant to satisfy players by dazzling them with graphically exhilarating scenes. These "payoffs," as Ritual likes to call them, range from a terrorist realistically tumbling down stairs to entire buildings crumbling before your eyes. One of the grandest spectacles places the player in a helicopter flying above a line of enemy vehicles. If you manage to destroy the lead truck, you'll cause a chain reaction that creates a massive explosion!

Whether this graphical trickery and the other single-player goodies impress you, or the online component enraptures you so deeply that CS becomes your first virtual sport, one thing is certain: Counter-Strike for Xbox will break many of the barriers so tightly enforced by the PC. Never before have console gamers been able to participate in creating their own mods and designing new levels, or take part in a virtual community of hundreds of thousands of people. If the Xbox version can garner enough support, this will mark the beginning of a new era.

The Human Anatomy

as deconstructed by Tao Feng

Fig. 1. – ***Considerable Pain***
The process of deconstructing the anatomy begins with bruising at the point of contact, leading to bloody contusions and cerebral hemorrhage.

Fig. 3. – ***Environmental Destruction***
Opponents are often hurled into walls and glass situated nearby, resulting in injuries of variable depth and size.

Fig. 4. – ***Hurtful Words***
Insults are unloaded regularly to further humiliate an opponent already suffering from repeated blows to the head.

FIG. 2. – *Physical Disability*
The deconstruction nears completion as limbs weaken and break from continuous physical abuse, finally rendering the enemy useless.

FIG. 5. – *Harm or Heal*
Once supernatural Chi reaches full capacity within the body, the powerful energy force can be unleashed to harm enemies or used to heal the damage they have inflicted on you.

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XBOX

NEW DAY

ADVENT RISING

Sometimes, great video games come from the most unlikely places. Advent is the story how a small, first-time developer came together with one of America's greatest living science fiction writers to create what could be the most exciting Xbox game you'll see next year. You might not have heard of Advent before, but trust us – this game will be generating more than its fair share of excitement in the coming months.

■ PLATFORM ■ STYLE ■ PUBLISHER ■ DEVELOPER ■ RELEASE

Glyphx is promising at least one amazing chase scene with these hoverbikes

Video games are an art form, though probably the most hard to intellectually pin down. Music is music. Books are books. Video games, however, are the product of a dizzying array of disparate influences, technologies, and aesthetics. Taking equally from the fields of art, comic books, computer science, film, and the often-overlooked tradition of arcade games of skill like pinball; video games represent, in some ways, the last evolution of entertainment. All major forms of media – from stirring orchestral scores to movie-quality visuals – can be found in games, but with one unprecedented difference: The audience actually takes part in shaping the experience for themselves. Characters move at your command; and, in some cases, the player actually makes decisions that alter the outcome of the story at hand. Balancing consumers' seemingly contradictory demands for both greater freedom of choice and compelling narrative is no small task – and this is perhaps one of the reasons that so many games simply fail to deliver a story that matches even a B-grade Hollywood film in terms of coherence and emotional impact.

While there are exceptions (ICO comes to mind, as do numerous sequences from Square's Final Fantasy series), most games simply don't make you feel anything in particular, apart from a sense of general excitement and satisfaction in having vanquished whatever obstacle had been standing in your way. This dearth of good storytelling can be attributed to a number of circumstances, the most important being the fact that, for the bulk of gaming's 25-year history, there simply wasn't the technology available to allow for anything more than plot exposition told through static cutscenes and text-based dialogue. Although this changed as the CD-ROM era ushered in games like Resident Evil and Metal Gear Solid – which were explicit in their cinematic ambitions – these titles' stilted scripts and wooden voice-acting illustrated what happens when people that were hired primarily as graphical and gameplay technicians attempted to emulate film genres that Hollywood had been perfecting for decades.

But, in their defense, at least they tried. Even today, as cutscenes continue to grow ever longer and more visually striking, many developers don't seem to have a clue how to make a plotline that succeeds in anything other than ushering the player between action sequences. And that's usually enough for many gamers. It was not in jest that Doom creator John Carmack once observed, "Story in a game is like story in a porn movie. It's expected to be there, but it's not that important."

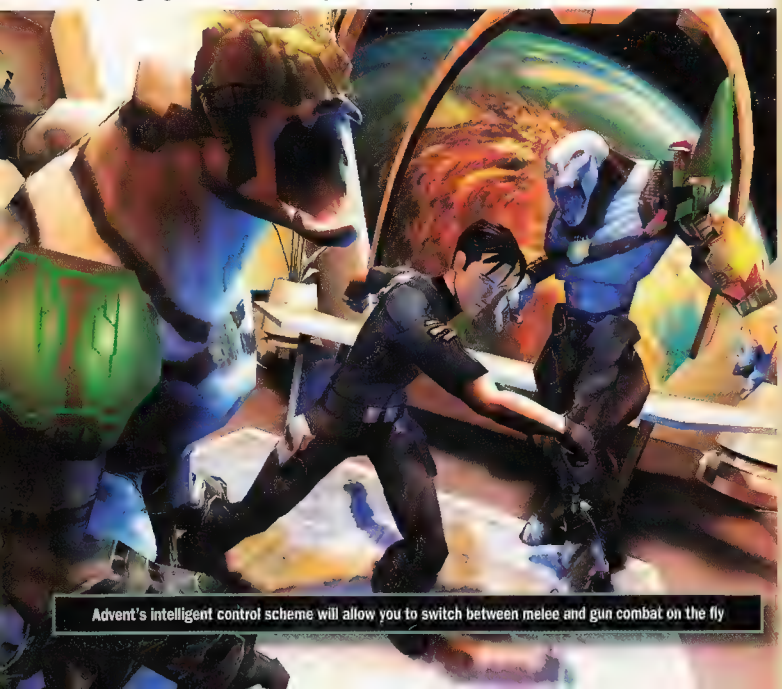
Glyphx, a Utah-based company well known in the industry for its background in 3D modeling and CG artwork, is looking to change all this with Advent, its first foray into the treacherous waters of game development. In crafting this project, an engrossing story has been a paramount goal; and talking with Glyphx's Todd Sheridon and Donald Mustard, the guiding forces behind Advent, you'll find that the word "emotion" comes up as often as the usual developer terms like "polygon performance" or "bump mapping." Far from an afterthought, Advent's story is a central part of the potentially mind-blowing experience that Glyphx is working feverishly to bring to the Xbox and PC early next year. Mustard makes their intentions clear: "Most games don't elicit much emotion. The basic emotions that you feel are fear and adrenaline, or just fun. Our [intent] is to evoke emotion, and a full range of emotion. Yes, we want people to feel terror in certain parts of the game, but we also want people to feel joy. I want people laughing; I want people crying; I want people laughing and crying at the same time. I want them to be so wrapped up in the story and the characters that they're totally immersed in this epic experience. I kind of want to take *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, and Jane Austen; and stick them together."

If the guys at Glyphx don't talk like typical developers, it's probably because they haven't actually been game developers for very long. Todd Sheridon founded the company in 1995 as an art house to serve the needs of the video game industry, which was just coming to grips with the increased creative demands of PlayStation development. Starting out with a focus on 3D modeling, Glyphx gradually expanded its reach to include everything from character design to box art to fully rendered FMV cutscenes. Along the way, the company worked with many top publishing firms, doing the box art for games like Spider-Man and Vigilante 8, and creating all of the acclaimed CG cutscenes for Eidos' The Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver I & II.

Even as Glyphx reached new heights of success, the team yearned to do more than simply create art assets for other people's games. Sheridon, who has an earnest, clean-cut demeanor more akin to a young, conscientious high school teacher than an artist, recalls, "We got to the point where a lot of our clients were coming to us for conceptual work, for help in designing their characters and art assets. We were more involved in actually designing the animation for the games, the cinematics, and story.... We knew everything we needed to know to actually develop an entire game ourselves, minus the coding. At one point, we just decided that we're going to drop all our high-end animation stuff and just focus on development." In this spirit, the company created a new team focused solely on games, allowing them to venture into uncharted territory while still maintaining their profitable art division.

Fate intervened in the form of Epic Games' masterful Unreal II engine, which provided Glyphx with the perfect tool with which to create Advent, a franchise that they were already planning on making into a trilogy of games. "When Unreal II came out, we saw the leap in quality between the first engine and the second one," comments Sheridon. "We said, 'Wow, now we're at the point where we can do the kind of high-quality visuals that we love to do in real-time – and without so many limitations.'"

With the Unreal II engine in hand, the company began recruiting staff members that had a background in programming and game design to start transforming the engine for the third-person game they envisioned, including both the lead programmers for Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six and the StarCraft Brood War expansion set.



Advent's intelligent control scheme will allow you to switch between melee and gun combat on the fly

AN INTERVIEW WITH ORSON SCOTT CARD

Orson Scott Card, along with Ray Bradbury and William Gibson, is widely hailed as being one of America's greatest living science fiction writers. As the author of the classic Ender's Game *series and the winner of numerous Nebula and Hugo awards, he is among the few that can actually be considered legendary in the field of literature. An avid gamer and former reviewer for* Compute *magazine, Card has worked on games in the past, crafting the dialogue for LucasArts' Escape From Monkey Island and The Dig. Now, he is lending his talents to Advent in a truly unprecedented partnership between a literary heavyweight and a game developer. To help promote Advent, which he obviously believes is going to be a groundbreaking moment for gaming, Mr. Card was kind enough to grant us this interview.*

You've worked on some games in the past. How did you come to be involved with Advent, and do you play games in your free time?

They're actually my life, and I do my writing in my spare time [laughs]. Of course, the games that I'm interested in are the old fogey-type games. I'm way too old for the quick-twitch games that require instant reflexes. When my eight-year-old left me in the dust, I realized that my time's done for that. I've been addicted to anything Sid Meier's done for years. Top-down, map-based games are more my style.

What attracted you to this project? What made Advent stick out to you?

Well, they approached me; it's not as if I woke up one morning with a plate of 25 game designers to choose from. But, I have been approached by quite a few different groups over the years, and I can't really make much of a contribution to a story that I don't care about or believe in. What they had was a terrific story and a terrific group of people who knew what they were doing. They handle graphics beautifully, they understand good gameplay, and they wanted to tell a story that meant something. Of course, there is the twitch aspect to the game – it wouldn't be fun if you didn't have that – but as you explore the story you're getting something a great deal more than in the average shoot 'em up game.

Could you tell us about Advent's story? What are some of the key themes that you would like the audience to take away from the game?

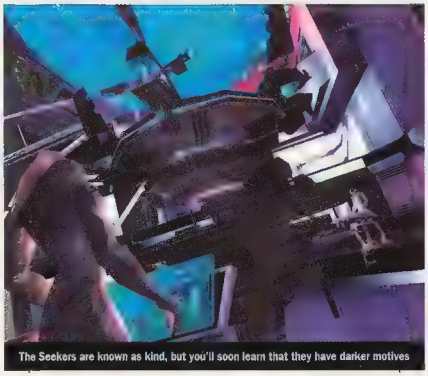
Well, if I start talking about "themes," you're getting into an area that makes my skin start to crawl. I have to admit I'm sort of anti-English department on this sort of thing. I don't want to talk about themes; what you come away with is characters. One of the problems in any kind of interactive game is that it's

(continued on page 51)

After a brief Advent demo earned approval from Epic Games, Sheridon and Glyphx felt confident that they could deliver a top-flight game-play experience. However, they still harbored some doubts about their ability to accomplish their goal of achieving a new standard in video game storytelling. With a basic plot structure in place, the decision was made to seek outside help in writing a script. The help would come in the form of one of the most respected writers in the world of science fiction, Orson Scott Card, the author of the classic *Ender's Game* series.

"At this point, we feel like we have all the talent necessary to do a really strong game," comments Sheridon. "We have an awesome concept, but what we need now is to fill in the gaps where we don't have strong talent. Writing was really the last big hole we felt we had. Plus, the game was never meant to be a one-off game; it was meant to be a franchise. When we decided to find a writer for our stuff, we said, 'Instead of starting at the bottom and moving our way up, let's just go all the way to the top and see what happens.'"

Even though Glyphx was not a highly recognized name, Card agreed to a meeting with the company. Shockingly, this long-shot gamble proved to be a wild success. "He came into our offices and we pitched the story to him, and he just sat and asked questions about the story," remembers Sheridon. "Then, when we were done, he sat back and said, 'This story doesn't need me; you guys have developed this to the point where you don't need me. That's why I want to do it, because you've got it to the point where it's not a matter of me coming in and salvaging a wreck; it's me coming in and making something good, great.' That got him really excited about it." [For more on Card's involvement in Advent, see our interview with the author on page 47.]



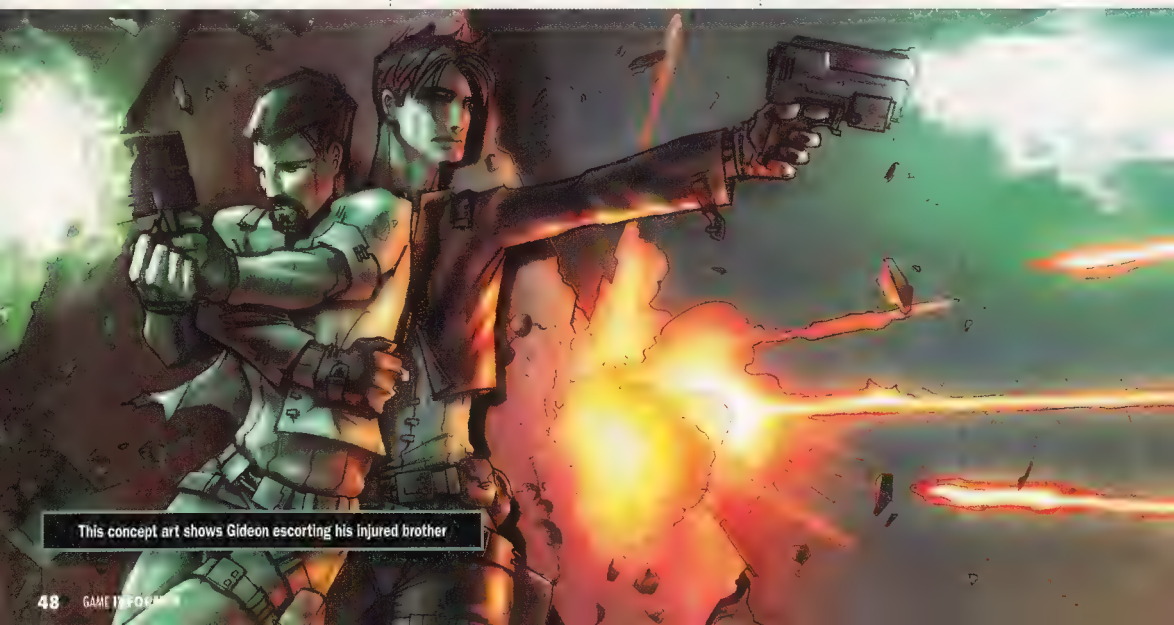
The Seekers are known as kind, but you'll soon learn that they have darker motives

Although he wouldn't reveal all of the game's dramatic twists and turns, Sheridon did give us Advent's basic premise, one that seems to offer up an intriguing twist on some well-worn science fiction themes. The story is set during the dawn of the era of intergalactic travel, which has resulted in the universe's many planets coming together to form a ruling governmental body. As these alien races come to learn more about each other, they begin to notice an odd similarity in their respective cultural and religious mythologies: rumors of a mysterious people called humans. No one has ever claimed to have seen a human in the flesh, but many cling to the belief that these strange beings will one day play a part in saving the universe.

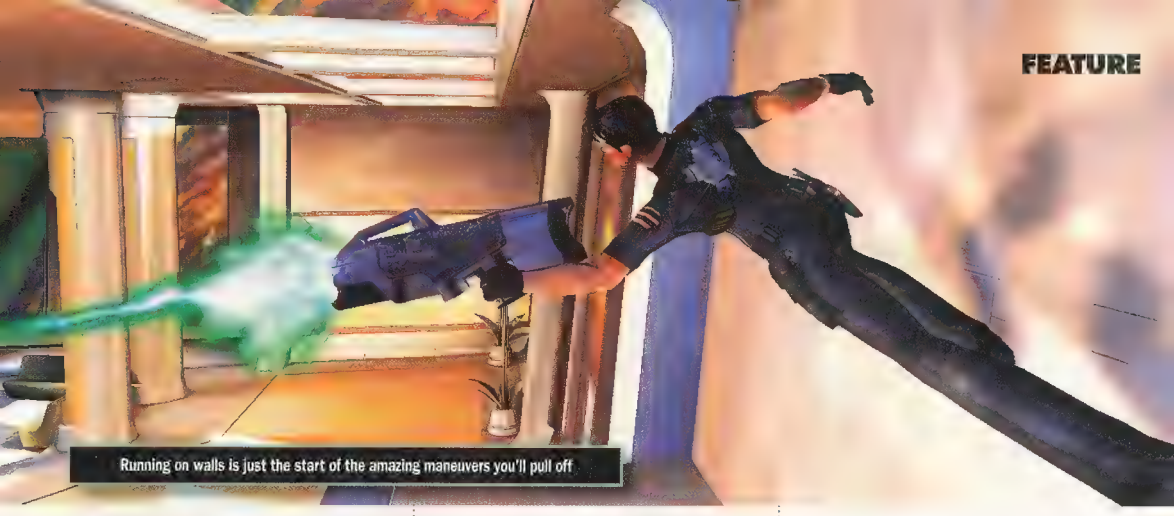
In theory, every planet has an equal voice in the universal government, but a race called the Seekers wields an enormous influence over most important matters. The Seekers are viewed as benevolent and are admired for their work in helping less-developed civilizations become technologically self-sufficient. To do this, newly discovered planets are placed in a 1,000-year program, in which they are ruled in a form of indentured servitude by the Seekers until they reach the point when they can become full members of society.

Advent's story hinges on the Aurelians, a noble alien people that are a few years from completing their millennium-long apprenticeship. Through a surprising series of events, the Aurelians discover that not only do humans actually exist, but that the Seekers have been exploring the far reaches of the universe in an effort to exterminate the last remaining human beings, using their charitable work with poorer planets as a cloak for their true motives.

Concealing their efforts, the Aurelians come in contact with a small band of humans who have been in hiding on Mars after surviving the Seeker's deadly attack on Earth. The humans are lead by Ethan Wyeth, a brave pilot who was instrumental in fending off the first alien onslaught more than 20 years ago. Players will assume the identity of Gideon, Ethan's brother, a reluctant hero who is thrown by fate into the difficult role of saving the last vestiges of humankind, while also coming to the aid of the Aurelians.



This concept art shows Gideon escorting his injured brother



Running on walls is just the start of the amazing maneuvers you'll pull off

That's a lot to chew on, but it really only scratches the surface of a story that will be every bit as deep and thought-provoking as you would expect from a project being guided by a writer the caliber of Orson Scott Card. Even more intriguing is Glyphx's promise that the story will actually change and evolve according to choices the player makes. For instance, in one scene, Gideon will fight with a space marine. After whipping him soundly, you can decide whether to kill him or show mercy. Later in the game, when you meet up with some military men who served with him, your decision will become key in whether they lend a helping hand or coldly turn their backs on you. Moral decisions like this are going to be crucial in determining the path that your characters take.

Although Card and Glyphx have done much work towards constructing a complex backstory to set the events of Advent against, Sheridon cautions that their goal is to create a story that enhances, rather than detracts from the gameplay experience. "When it comes to cutscenes, given the fact that we have all this experience in that area, you would assume that we were going to be spending a lot of time doing cutscenes for the game," he comments. "But, our philosophy is a little different; we want the cutscenes to be things that you play and experience, and not so much things that you sit back and watch."

Donald Mustard adds, "One of the things we like about Card was that he has a talent for capturing characters concisely, which is perfect for a game. You can't have this long exposition – that's what is killing games right now. That's the problem with Final Fantasy and Metal Gear; they don't know how to tell a story for an American audience in a way that's short and concise, yet still has power and impact."

To make sure that his vision is perfectly realized, Card will be on-hand to oversee the recording of the game's voiceovers. While giving his input on casting choices, he will also direct the studio sessions, making sure that the performances are true to the meaning and the emotional pitch of every line. In addition, he is working on a novel that will act as a companion piece to the game. If successful, more books will follow – each corresponding to a chapter in the planned Advent trilogy.

After being burned in the past by developers that put their directorial aspirations over the demands of solid gameplay, we naturally questioned whether Advent would have the gameplay to equal its cinematic scope. Suffice it to say that these doubts were more than put to ease by Advent lead designer Donald Mustard.

Mustard, who looks youthful enough to pass for one of the teenage boys that he hopes will purchase his game by the thousands, speaks about Advent with a passionate enthusiasm that sometimes borders on mania. Perhaps "speak" isn't exactly the right word, as Mustard doesn't so much talk about games as act them out. During our conversation, he was rarely able to sit down for more than a few minutes at a time, frequently jumping up to imitate the main character's arsenal of combat maneuvers.

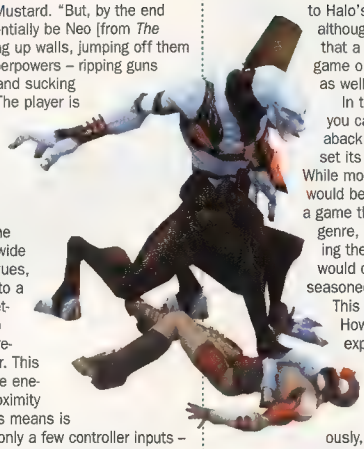
His excitement is infectious, and we couldn't help but be impressed by the sheer level of variety that is being attempted here. Think about almost any title – be it Max Payne, Devil May Cry, Jedi Outcast, or Halo – that has pushed the boundaries of gameplay in the past few years, weave them together with a surprisingly intuitive control scheme, and you'll begin to get an idea of what Advent is all about.

"We wanted to create a game that had a full range," said Mustard. "You'll have a full set of weapons like in Devil May Cry. Our targeting system, because of this, allows us to have full dynamic animations like pulling weapons off guards and targeting multiple enemies. We [also] have a full range of hand-to-hand, so when guys come in close you'll be kicking and punching."

Impressed? Well, stand back, because that's just the tip of the iceberg. Even as you begin to master the art of combat, Gideon will realize that he has unstable telekinetic powers that he is only beginning to understand. As you become more adept at tapping into these mental forces, Advent's gameplay will make a sharp turn away from gunplay.

"You'll start the game with all these sweet weapons, and play

through it," describes Mustard. "But, by the end of the game you'll essentially be Neo [from *The Matrix*]. You'll be running up walls, jumping off them and using all these superpowers – ripping guns out of people's hands and sucking them into your hands. The player is so much better than any weapon. You're punching guys and they're flying back 30 feet and slamming through walls."



In giving the player the freedom to embrace a wide array of combat techniques, much work has gone into a dynamic, AI-driven targeting system that sets up multiple "zones of awareness" around the player. This allows the AI to prioritize enemies based on both proximity and threat. What all this means is that – through the use only a few controller inputs – you'll be able to quickly switch between acrobatic moves, shooting multiple targets, and levitating and throwing environmental objects with your mental powers. For those who wish to be more hands-on, you can manually toggle between targets using the left analog stick. In essence, it's an extremely versatile, more action-oriented variation on the control scheme Nintendo has used in the last three installments of The Legend of Zelda.

To make matters even more interesting, Glyphx also plans to include a host of vehicles into the mix – including futuristic hoverbikes, giant military assault rigs, and smaller all-terrain units. Control during these sections of gameplay will be similar to Halo's fixed-pivot turning, although there is a possibility that a more traditional racing-game option will be available as well.

In the final assessment, you can't help but be taken aback by how high Glyphx has set its sights in making Advent. While most first-time developers would be happy to simply make a game that's competent in its genre, the Advent team is rolling the dice on a project that would challenge even the most seasoned company's abilities. This begs the question: How can Glyphx reasonably expect to pull off a project of this magnitude?

"We're just that good!" jokes Donald Mustard. More seriously, he adds, "Actually, the only way it's possible is that we started with so much pre-production and had such a strong engine. We had two years [to prepare], and that allows us to spend all our time just making the game. Unless you're a very established developer, and you've done tons of games, you don't have the time or budget to write your own engine. So, either you're going to write your own engine and have a crappy game, or take someone else's engine and maybe you'll have the chance to actually focus on making it good."

You certainly can't help but root for them. By all appearances, this is a bunch of nice, hard-working guys trying to make the game they've always dreamed of playing, and getting a chance to collaborate with one of their heroes while they do it. In many ways, it's just another variation on the American Dream – and another reason why video games are still one of the few entertainment industries left where less-established companies can sit down and play their hands at the high-stakes table. If Glyphx succeeds, gamers around the world will be rewarded with one of the defining games of the Xbox era. Here's to hoping.

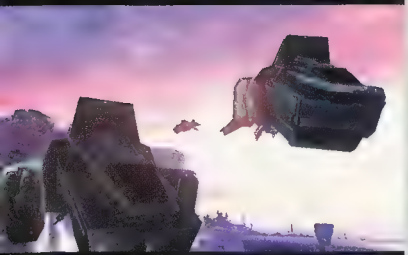
Targeting is automatic, but easily switched

Orson Scott Card will be directing the voice acting for all of Advent's cutscenes

Using the Unreal II engine has made it easy for Glyphx to render grand, detailed vistas like this

Here's another example of the U II engine's high level of texturing and shading technology

This is one of several vehicles you'll drive in Advent



We also expect that you may be piloting some drop ships as well

(continued from page 47)

very hard to have the hero have any kind of character because the hero is the player. So, there's not much motivation other than the fact that you've got to kill everybody as fast as you can and solve all the puzzles and problems.

What Glyphx has managed to do is they have made it so the main character actually has some important ethical dilemmas, and you have to live with the consequences of the choices you make. They're not the kind of dilemmas that I think are easy. The good versus evil thing – that's a piece of cake. Nobody has much difficulty choosing between Sauron and Gandolf in *The Lord of the Rings*. Here, you have [situations] where no option is actually very good, but you still have to make a choice.

What are the challenges of storytelling in a video game? Obviously, there are certain constraints, and players have a great degree of free choice. How does this change your creative approach, as opposed to doing books or movies?

Well, there are games where there is a lot of free choice; games where you recreate the game board as you go. However, in [an action game], there is no practical way to allow anything more than the illusion of free choice. You can make choices up to a point, but you're always going to be funneled through certain doors into the next scene that has been prepared. When you're playing, because you can move the character in any direction you want, shoot at anything you want; you feel free, but you're being shaped and guided. That makes it so that, as a writer, when I'm writing game dialogue, I only have a limited number of possibilities to deal with. It's not that different from the other dramatic writing I've done.

Let's talk about Advent's storyline. How many changes did you implement into what the developers had already conceived?

They've given me a great deal of freedom to change what things mean – to change characterization and so forth. The overall storyline has to follow what the game's going to do. They're developing the settings and the flow of the game, and I really can't mess with that too much. And I don't really want to, because it's excellent. What I have room to do [is change things like] what events mean to characters, what their attitude is, and what their relationships are. Those are things Glyphx has essentially handed to me, and they're very cooperative with that – nobody's married to any one idea. It's as lovely a collaboration as I could imagine.

We've heard that you are planning to write a series of books that will be companion pieces to the Advent trilogy of games. Is this true?

There will be as many books as there are games. I am on board to write the first one. As the dialogue writer for the game, I can make sure that the novel and game agree with each other. We're hoping that the book comes out at the same time as the game.

A lot of video game plots have traditionally been pretty clichéd; do you think that partnerships like the one between you and Glyphx are the future? How can authors help to improve the overall quality of games?

It depends, because novelists don't always think like gamers. I really have been involved with games for many, many years, and I understand what games require to a greater degree than many novelists do. It depends on who the novelist is. I imagine that [*Sandman* comic creator and author] Neil Gaiman, for example, would do a brilliant job, because he's worked in different media. He knows how to think like a non-novelist. I can think of others – not to speak ill of them at all – that simply aren't prepared to step in and do this kind of collaboration. If you think like a novelist and only like a novelist, you're not going to be much help, because the way things flow is different.

We know you don't like to get too much into discussing themes, but video games have been criticized in recent years for being overly violent and teaching children immoral behavior. How do you feel about games like Grand Theft Auto III? Do you agree that some games are potentially harmful?

Well, when you're talking about moral issues in storytelling, which gaming is certainly one means of doing, there are different things. There's the level of decorum: What's going to offend somebody? I think that's the most trivial issue, and the most easily fixed. Anybody that thinks they're doing something important by putting bad words, nudity, or really vicious violence in a game – they're not doing much, and I'm not terribly impressed by those that want to be edgy by doing cheap effects. I also don't think it does that much harm. It's just impolite and pointless.

At the same time, there is a level where there are moral choices involved in games. I don't know what it does to people; and I worry about what it does to people, when you're in a game that rewards you for basically killing anything that moves.

In talking to the Advent developers that we met, they said one of their goals was to make sure that your character's choices and behavior have consequences in the outcome of the story and how other people react towards you. Is this an intentional reaction to the ways that many games seem to pile on senseless or purposeless violence?

I know that I'm happy that this is not a story of mindless killing. This is a story where, yes, you fight when you need to fight, but your goal is not simply to wipe out every living thing. Instead, you have allies; you have people on your side, people that you need to befriend and trust in order to accomplish your purpose. These are things that don't usually show up in video games. So, in some ways, this will be far more like real life. You don't just blast away.

PLAYSTATION 2/XBOX/GAMECUBE

SPY HUNTER 2

TRANSFORMATIONS

Midway hopes to beat the odds a second time. There were more than a few people who thought that bringing back Spy Hunter could have disastrous consequences. As with *Star Wars*, for example, people don't like their happy memories toyed with. Fortunately, Midway and developer Paradigm were hitting on all cylinders, as Spy Hunter perfectly fit the bill for anyone looking – not so much for the original – but for an all-new high octane take on a property we all knew and loved.

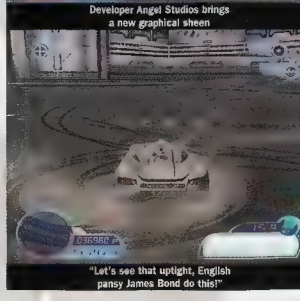
Now, Midway has the beast of its own success to wrestle with. If "pleasantly surprised" could be said about the first Spy Hunter, such a term won't suffice this time around. The publisher is aware of this and is not about to rest on its laurels. Change is the operative word for SH 2. Producer Michael Gottlieb would promise us only one thing: The logo would probably be the only element that remains from the first Hunter. Enter, Angel Studios (now known as Rockstar San Diego). If you ask Gottlieb, Angel's involvment makes all the difference. "Everything has been redone," he says. "If [Spy Hunter developer] Paradigm had not been bought out by Infogrames, [SH 2] probably would have been the same game. We pretty much took the finished product to Angel and said, 'This is what we did with the last game, what should we do with it next?' Everything about this feels different; plays different. Everything under the hood is different."

Check out the upgrades available

While gamers will notice the influence of Angel in the way your redesigned Interceptor feels on the road, more wholesale changes are taking place. Boss battles are being introduced, and this is just one of the new objectives. Apart from having these larger-than-life baddies pester you throughout a level, players will face Twisted Metal-style arena interludes that you must complete before moving on. To address the length concern with the last Spy Hunter and to add some beef, secondary objectives have been added. While these don't progress the plot, they are there so you can earn vehicle upgrades and kick some more ass while you're at it.

Spy Hunter 2 will also throw some new curves at you – some of which are even female. A special character (so far named Agent X) will be introduced. While Midway was very tight-lipped about this spy babe's actual involvement in the game, we did find out that she will show up for some co-op play on certain levels. Your one true love – the Interceptor – is also taking new forms. An offroad vehicle mode has been added, as has a snowmobile variation. Furthermore, you can now use the Escape Cycle when you please, as it's no longer just your last level of damage. This bike can even trigger a projectile proximity bomb to waste all in its radius.

Developer Angel Studios brings a new graphical sheen



"Let's see that uptight, English pansy James Bond do this!"

As if these changes weren't enough to bump the franchise's action quotient up a notch, Midway also plans to have more branching paths in levels, as well as simply more ways to get around the landscape. "Each mission is going to have lots of different 'moments.' Moments are anytime where you say the word 'cool' without even trying," declares Gottlieb. It seems very clear that, for its part, Midway has already tried hard to make Spy Hunter 2 yet another title that will take gamers by storm.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY ■ **DEVELOPER** ANGEL STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** FALL

There is now more than one way to go through a level

This is the notorious warehouse where all the video game crates and boxes are stored

The infamous "Crazy Train," ladies and gentlemen

Apart from battling enemies, players will often have to think their way around environmental problems

Wanted: Someone to man watchtower. Those with no friends/relatives and who like seclusion urged to apply

Seeing your bike will no longer be a sign of trouble